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ARGOSY

STORIES BY

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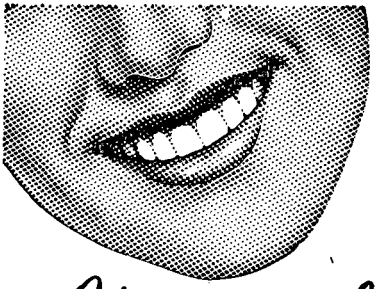

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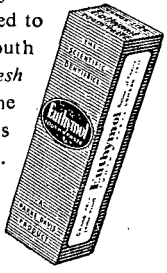

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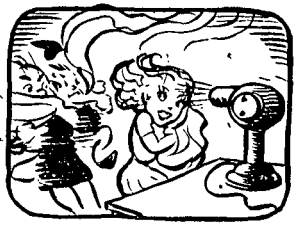

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ARGOSY

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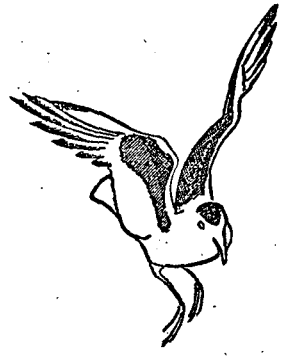

Reveille

AS I walked over the western plain
The silent snow descending
I saw winter lean on the valley's edge
His frozen medals spending.

Silent he lay, like Gulliver,
Over the tiny town,
His heels kicking for cold at Brown Willy,
His loins on Wilsey Down.

I saw his three-cornered hat
Making an alp of the sky,
The snow flossing his blue coat and his buckles,
Drifting his lip and eye.

Brittle O brittle hangs the steeple :
A finger of white,
The insidious snow furling, whirling
In the glass ball of night.

Set forth so, imagination !
Loot the locked turrets of light,
Speak with the tongues of bandits and angels,
Put winter to flight !

CHARLES CAUSLEY

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MISS PEG'S PARCEL

It was more than just a package, it was all her troubles wrapped up in newsprint

by JOHN HERSEY

"I WELL remember," said Miss Peg, the pastry cook, with a chocolate éclair hovering in her fingers, "the night I fell into the embrace of the United States Merchant Marine. I weighed a scant fourteen stone at that time. I was, you might say, thin as a shelf."

Probably Miss Peg meant to say "sylph." In fairness, you had to grant to Miss Peg that she was always willing to risk elegance, if there was any of it handy. Only sometimes her tongue slipped—especially if it was all lubricated to receive an éclair or a napoleon.

They were gathered—Miss Peg, Mrs. Manterbaum, and Johnny, the second kitchen boy—in the pantry locker down in the basement. As pastry chef, Miss Peg kept the key to the locker, and late each evening, about eleven o'clock, when the clubhouse was quite deserted and lay black and junky on the Florida beach, like a tremendous shipwreck, she would come stealthily in through the service entrance to the basement with one or two guests, unlock the wire mesh door to her locker, light up the single bare bulb that hung down from the ceiling, get out a few good things, seat the party on the wooden crates she kept her pans in, and then she would begin to talk.

Mrs. Manterbaum, whose job was to keep the beach huts clean, was notorious among the help for her sweet tooth, a regular sugar-thief, and she had worked herself into the position of being invited by Miss Peg almost every night to taste a few "extra" pastries. Miss Peg used to ask Johnny, the second kitchen boy, about once a week, because he was good-natured about pushing her pastry cart round to the Big People in the dining room for her. If there was one thing she hated in life, it was cart pushing. That, and bending down to slide her trays in and out of her ovens.

"I was twenty-three," Miss Peg said, "and I was then doing scullery work for a certain Mrs. Charles Saunders in Old Bridge Harbour, on Long Island. Mr. Saunders was in asphalt and, as we used to say, he couldn't get out. Though in truth he was prosperous. Mrs. Saunders had fourteen in service. I remember

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one thing about Mr. Saunders, which was, he was very particular about the way his shoes were laid out in the mornings—the laces had to be real loose and the tongues lifted out and bent forward, so he could more or less walk right into them. If Mr. Saunders had any difficulty about walking into his shoes any morning, he was liable to a very bad state of mind at breakfast, and goodness knew who would feel the shock of it.

"You understand, I only heard these things. Small Peggety, as they called me—the 'Small' was belittling, you might say, considering my heftiness—never advanced beyond the Near Pantry, and had no occasion to see Mr. Saunders standing in his own shoes, laced or unlaced. Fact is, the first time I ever laid eyes on him, close to, was the day the United States Merchant Marine and I had our little heave-to.

"It happened in the following particulars. My cousin Bob, who never came across with the rest of us, lives some short distance outside Greenock, on the Clyde, and he being a familiar of certain public houses on the waterfront, travels, you might say, victoriously—by talking with those who go to sea."

"Vicariously," Johnny said.

"I beg your pardon?" Miss Peg said, very grand.

Johnny realized one of the reasons Miss Peg liked him was that he had gone through three years of high school and was, in her words, "a bookish lad." Miss Peg had never had any schooling, and her elegance had been picked up over the years of service while she was passing the peas, so to speak. Johnny dared, now and then, to catch her up on some of her errors of overreaching.

"Your cousin Bob," Johnny said, "travels vicariously."

"*Well?*" said Miss Peg, with rising tone, as if to ask why the young scoundrel felt it necessary to repeat something that had already been said. "So one evening," she went on, "Bob met this tidy, small-boned Yank, a boatswain's mate, third class, in the United States Merchant Marine, named Stephano. A swarthy sort. Talking of one big thing and another, they landed at last upon me, so it was necessary—Bob thought—to tell the fellow all about me. I will say, Bob has a straight tongue, he did not dangle any pretty marionette before this Stephano's eyes. To be blunt about it, he said his cousin Peggety was *fat*. 'So much the better,' says this Stephano. 'I always was squeamish about getting myself bruised against sharp and knobby things. I am glad to hear that you have a nice soft cousin.'

"The first thing *I* knew," said Peg, "I received a postcard written in a fine Eyetalian hand, all curlicues and scrolls on the capital letters, like a birthday cake, saying, *Meet me outside Ritz corner 46 and Mad six pm Thursday evening. Assume this is helps*

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night out. I have grand news of your cousin Bob from other side. Stephano, Bsns Mate 3/c, S.S. Fanter. This 'grand news' "—Miss Peg said, leaping ahead in her narrative—" was that our Bob was spending much time in the public houses and was a two-hump camel when it came to the ale: he could drink twice as much and hold it twice as long as anyone else. 'Grand news'!

" The next Thursday," Miss Peg resumed, " I got myself all frilled up, smelling like a church on Easter morning, and Mason, the chauffeur, was just about to drive the help to the station, and me, sitting there, taking up half the back seat of the car, happy as a sandboy thinking about my unknown sailor boy, when out comes a message: 'Tell Small Peggety to stop by at Mr. Saunders' office, 30 Rockefeller Plaza. He has a wee errand for her.'

" Our Maggie, the cook, who if I was overweight she was a dried-up apricot, said sarcastic, 'Write down the address. Our Peggety is in love, she's a bag of daydreams, she'll never remember.'

" Between the message and Maggie, it took quite some time for the others to dill me down to where I was calm again. Wasn't it just like Mr. Saunders to save his 'wee errands' for *that* day? Any other time, this command would have made me tingle with the fun of doing it—'thistles in me thumbs,' as our Mum used to say when she had a thrill. But that day, it was all I could do to think of my seafaring man with the handwriting like Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee fireworks.

" Nevertheless, when we reached the city, I went of course as directed to 30 Rockefeller Plaza and I shot up into the sky where Mr. Saunders did his work and up I went to the lady at the desk and I said, trying to be sort of saucy and mature, 'I am the Peggety. Mr. Saunders has a wee errand for me.'

" The lady looked at me and said, 'Sister, aren't you kind of dressed up for *this* errand?'

" So I replied, 'The nature of the work was not divulged, you might say.'

" The lady flicked a switch on a box, and Mr. Saunders' voice came out of the box, sounding like his nose had been snipped off by a crow or was pinched with a clothes peg; he said, 'What is it?'

" 'Your maid,' the lady said, 'has come for the carcass.'

" This gave me the goose pimples all over, and since I was a girl with a large skin area, you might say, there was a considerable amount of puckering up to be got done with.

" Mr. Saunders kind of laughed a noseless laugh from the box and said, 'Send her in.'

" I walked into the office whither the lady nodded, and there he was, the master, looking very wild, but with his nose quite unharmed.

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It must have been merely the mechanics of the box that had taken away his nose from his voice. In general the master was very wild, however. He was in his shirt sleeves and he was dressed in a big white apron and he had in his hand a butcher's knife of the largest sort, and I thought: Oh me, I thought asphalt was used to pave the roads, what *can* it be that the master does for a living?

"He said to me, 'Sit down, girl, I'll be ready in a few minutes.'

"It was then," Miss Peg said, "that I noticed another gentleman in the room, he was dressed in ordinary business clothes, though his look was rather ferocious, too, it seemed to me, but at the time, you must remember, I was only Small Peggety, twenty-three winters along, tipping the scales at approximately fourteen stone, with no experience of the world beyond the Near Pantry.

"I also noticed—and this hit me all of a sudden, like the sun coming out from under a cloud—a smell in the place like Fulton Street at the East River, in other words, fish in all its glory. And by following my senses, I tracked this scent to Mr. Saunders' desk, where lay, about as big as my upper arm—no, bigger—a whole salmon. A very substantial fish, I can assure you, Mrs. Manterbaum.

"Mr. Saunders grasped the butcher knife in both hands, and he began to stagger and struggle around the room, talking the while like that radio fellow, Mr. Clem McCarthy, dealing with the Derby, in case you are interested in the horses, Mrs. Manterbaum—breathless he was and yet in command of the telling. I soon puzzled it out that Mr. Saunders was describing to his friend the capture of this particular salmon of his. He was using the butcher knife for his rod and reel, and I was fearful lest he would fish himself into total blindness with that sharp thing.

"And so we had game-fishing all up and down the office for the next half hour. They say that salmon do go up river in order to make love, and to hear Mr. Saunders speak of the reluctance of this whopper to leave the headwaters of the Skampawam, or whatever the river would be named, in Canada, it was—to hear *him*, I believe this fish must have been engaged in the romance of the century in the salmon world. Really, the aquarium should be told about it. Well! I tell you! We *finally* landed the thing, but we were panting and giving off a deal of perspiration over it—and there the lecherous rascal was, big as life and ten times smellier, right on Mr. Saunders' desk, asphalt be damned.

"'He's been thawing out all day,' Mr. Saunders said. 'We shipped him down in dry ice. His guts were cleaned up there, and now'—advancing on the salmon with the dreadful knife, he said this—'now I'm going to lop off his head and tail so the girl here can manage him by hand and take him home for us, and tomorrow night, Spencer—! Well, you'll just have to wait and taste him.'

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" Our creature was thawed out all right, and he gave up his head till there was salmon blood all over the newspapers on Mr. Saunders' desk. Likewise the tail, a smaller operation but also not without splashes and clots of red. By this time the odour of fish was almost a fog around us that you could see. Whew!

" More newspapers, a bundle, string; there we were. 'Now, girl,' said Mr. Saunders, who, never having been on *my* side of the Near Pantry, of course did not know me by name, 'now, girl, you may take it home. And have a care!'

" What a care I had, all that suffering night! And yet . . .

" It was now, you see, pushing six o'clock, because of the length of Mr. Saunders' description of his triumph over the poor hooked thing. Thus, if I was to meet my friend with the birthday-cake handwriting, I would have to rush right over there, with no time to park my bundle meanwhile. Right through the newspaper, through goodness knows how many layers of current events, you could not fail to smell my pink beheaded treat. Trembling I dashed to the Ritz, corner of Madison and Forty-sixth.

" I was on time but early. The Merchant Marine, being a man of the world, had decided to have a wee tease of Small Peggety, who knew nothing. So there I stood, before the most swishy hotel in the land, waiting, with ladies going by in ermine and sapphires and curls right out of the permanent-wave machine, and me, under the marquee with all its sweet little light bulbs, me, embracing a two-and-a-half-foot stink. I was mortified to death, Mrs. Manterbaum.

" At last he came and worth waiting for. Short, stocky, and sort of pale Moorish-complected. His pants as tight as wedding gloves. He was a lovely, tiny creature. He strolled right up to me, with all the swagger of his cute bowlegs, and he said, raising his white cap, 'Miss Peggety, if I am not mistaken. I could have spotted you, my dear, from a mile away.'

" Well, he had my heart right then and there, though now I can see that his first remark—about kenning me from such a very impressive distance—left something to be desired as a compliment.

" Right there on the street corner, as he gazed up into my eyes, looking for my soul, you might say, and my heart like a moth by a sixty-watt lamp, I saw that the flanges of his nostrils were working away quite passionate, exactly like Mr. Rudolph Valentino's, but then I realized that it wasn't so much love at first sight as it was he had caught a whiff of something about my person. What he smelt, you already know, Mrs. Manterbaum.

" I had no doubt, in the next moments, that my Stephano was as packed full of gentility as his bell bottoms were packed full of Stephano. Because without so much as muttering, 'Hm, fishy out

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tonight, ain't it, Miss Peggety ? '—with no such remarks, without a flicker of his lovely waxen eyelids, without even moving to windward of me, he said, ' Well, my dear, what'll it be ? Shall we dance ? Or is food your pleasure ? A steak, Miss Peggety ? ' You see how well bred he was ? Steak ! Any lesser man would have asked me if I was in the mood for a bite of sea food.

" Timid, I said, ' First off, Mr. Stephano, I'd like to run down to Grand Central and park this parcel for the evening.'

" I could see from the way my Stephano looked at the package in my arms that he knew what I was carrying. Jaunty as you please he swung around and offered me the crook of his arm.

" At the parcel place in Grand Central I just pushed the package across the brass-plated counter.

" ' Sorry, lady,' the counterman said, ' we ain't allowed to accept no carrion here.'

" I guess my feelings took a tumble that you could see and hear, because Stephano said, ' Cheer up, my dear, we'll just hurry over to Pennsylvania Station. We should have done that in the first place. You'll have to leave from there when our spree is over.'

" But the man in the parcel room at Penn Station said even less than our Grand Central fellow. Indeed, he looked at us at first with a dread look of suspicion, as if we were trying to dispose of the parts of a human body, one by one. I must confess, with the moisture and even some of the tint of corpuscles beginning to show through at the ends, my package might have been a man's thigh piece, from groin to kneecap. Except for the odour, which gave us an unmistakable alibi. All the man at the Penn Station counter said was, ' Uhn-uhn,' negative.

" My Stephano was a cheerful little rooster, he said we should try the Hotel Wentman, just a couple blocks over ; they had a big cloakroom, he said. No luck. We tried the Hampdon and the Marjoran. No and no. They wouldn't even let us all the way across the lobby at the St. Anselm. Mr. Stephano tried to rent a room at a little no-good place away over west, thinking we would put our salmon to bed in it, but they stopped us in the elevator.

" And so it was that at a few minutes before eight o'clock in the evening we stood on a windswept corner in western Manhattan, and the tears welled up in my eyes, and not even my pigeon, my Stephano, could comfort me. For suddenly I realized that this parcel was more than a cut-off salmon. This was all my troubles, wrapped up in shabby newsprint. This was all the things that kept me from all my desires. That package—I suddenly realized it, Mrs. Manterbaum—that package was all the unhappiness I couldn't get rid of in this life : it was my fleshiness, my unbeatable appetite for chocolate things, and my being without any learning, and no friends to speak of, and

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teased by such spiteful old maids as our Maggie, and couldn't even be promoted past the Near Pantry, and what good was I anyhow? And I was embracing all these things in my arms like a dear beloved friend, and smelling to high heaven of the burden.

"Then it was that my Stephano said, 'Well, Miss Peggety, three's a crowd, but let's face facts, he goes where we go.'

"And I suddenly realized, you have to live with whatever it is you have to live with, so I dried my eyes and said, 'Suits me.'

"'Well!' he beamed, and a gold tooth he had glistened like the planet Venus at the edge of night. 'What was it to be, steak or a little twinkletoes?'

"Now that I knew where I was, with my shortcomings folded up in a wee bundle of old papers, you might say, and my Stephano willing to accept them if I would, I grew bold suddenly and said, 'Couldn't we do both, Mr. Stephano?'

"'Miss Peggety, you're a dear,' he said, and if I had cried this time, it would have been for other reasons than mere fishiness. My Stephano was so delicate!

"We had a grand time, I can tell you. My Stephano took me here and there, now dancing, now eating, now tippling a wee beer, now riding a Fifth Avenue bus just for the ride, as idle as you please. Soon we were used to our scaly friend and his consequences. What if everybody *did* turn and give us a stare, with tiny wrinkles at the bridge of the nose? In a way, it was gaudy, you might say. Surely Small Peggety had never in her life attracted so much attention, either from eye or nostril. I will go further.

"Our salmon became more than a novelty: he was, at last, a handy thing to have about the person. In a crowded situation, we could always get passageway—the mob just opened up for us, real respectful. In the eating places (my Stephano took me to some of the basement ones, away to the fringes of the great city, where, either through kinship with the proprietor or a grand little tip, there was never a question of accepting us with our third party), we used it for a little extra table, beside us, to hold an ash tray or perhaps a wee pony of spirits. There it was, squared off at both ends, like a piece of log, and it stood up steady and true. And there our hands did brush against one another: that was when I knew that my Stephano was the nicest one of all.

"Indeed, what except my parcel of shortcomings led to the bliss of the evening? I had to be back to the Near Pantry by seven in the morning, which meant, at the latest, the five-thirteen from Penn Station. It was still only about three in the morning when my Stephano, with the gentlest way in the world, said, 'My dear, don't you think that your salmon needs a little ventilation? I should hate, for your Mr. Saunders' sake, to have it fester. It wants

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aeration. I propose that we go up to Central Park, and fold back the newspapers, and give it the night air to keep it tasty.'

"That we did. We found a wee hillock, away from the paved walks—'Asphalt!' my Stephano had remarked as we had gone along the walks. 'Your Mr. Saunders is everywhere'—and we set up our fish on the hill and peeled away the newsprint. We moved away a little, to wait for the salmon to grow mellow, when, next thing I knew, as natural as the dew all around and the constellations winking up there, Stephano got his arms about me. He could just barely make it with his short little arms and my girth which he praised. And he stood on tiptoe and kissed me."

Miss Peg's voice had fallen low; her eyelids shaded her jovial eyes in a modest downward look. Mrs. Manterbaum sighed.

"Did you catch your train?" Johnny, the kitchen boy, asked.

"I caught my train, Johnny," Miss Peg said. "Yes, I caught my train." She paused. "I never saw my Stephano again, either. He was the hit-and-run sort, you might say. But I don't know, Johnny, it didn't matter. That night did something for me. You know, Mrs. Manterbaum, I have never been able to give sufficient worry to my faults since that night. Some would call me slack . . . I don't know . . . Yes, I caught the five-thirteen, Johnny."

"How was the fish next night?" Mrs. Manterbaum asked.

"When they brought it out to the Near Pantry, after the second serving," Miss Peg replied, "I dared to cut away a wee snippet. I put it in my mouth. Oh, heavens, Mrs. Manterbaum! It faded on the tongue. It put this angel cake of mine to shame. And as I rested the morsel against my palate and let it warm my throat, I squeezed out a sob, Mrs. Manterbaum, and I said to myself, 'I'm not so bad as I thought, not half so bad' . . . *Well!*" Miss Peg said abruptly and more briskly. "Time to lock up."

Miss Peg lifted the tray of delicacies and slid it on to the shelf where it belonged. She stood up and dusted the crumbs from the front of her dress, seeming to be rather pleased with herself.

★*This attractive story is the work of one of America's most brilliant young authors. When in* 1946 "*The New Yorker*" *devoted an entire number to the publication of his report on* Hiroshima, *John Hersey was already well known as winner of the Pulitzer Prize with his novel,* A Bell for Adano. *Round-the-world traveller at the age of four, student at Yale and Cambridge, private secretary to Sinclair Lewis, war correspondent, and author of a recent, highly-praised novel,* The Wall, *Mr. Hersey now lives in Connecticut with his wife and four children.*

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SNOW WATER

This girl had the calm that slept in the mountain streams—and much more

by LORD DUNSANY

SOMEONE had told a tale at our club, such a tale as, common enough in our day, could scarcely have been told in any other age. "Men have extraordinary abilities when the occasion arises," he said.

"Nothing to say what women have," broke in Jorkens.

One or two of us looked up to make some comment, but could not actually think of one.

Lunch was long over, and in an idle hour, resting in armchairs, we listened to Jorkens, who at once began his story. And the only reason for which I offer it to my readers is not for any explanation that I am able to give of it, but merely because he insisted again and again that the central fact of the story was perfectly true. The place, and even the circumstances he may have altered, rather than give to the club the private affairs of a friend, but the extraordinary achievement of which he told he insisted was perfectly true. And where liquid measurements are concerned, as they are here, I should incline to take the word of Jorkens, who certainly was familiar with them.

I was sitting, one lovely Indian night, he said, on the verandah of a little house in a jungle, with a garden in a clearing before the door, radiant with morning glory by daylight, but sleeping now in darkness under the stars. I was sitting smoking in the warm night with an Indian friend after dinner, when he told me this story. His children were long asleep and we were alone there, two dim figures in the dark, with our faces lit now and then by the glow of cigars whenever we drew at them; but at dinner his wife had been with us, rather shy, and leaving us alone the moment dinner was over, as though she missed the little veil that had rested on the table before her face, whenever a male guest was present, until, I think, very recently, when a wave of modernity had reached it at last and swept it away.

My Indian friend, Sharudah Thahn, and I had been having champagne and, when I had moved a crystal flagon of it towards

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her, he had shaken his head and said "No, no. She never touches it." So he and I finished the champagne between us, while she drank water that she would have got with a brass bowl from a jungle-wandering stream, whose little voice we could hear in the hush of the night. But to his story.

"Won't you have some more champagne out here?" he said. "But do. I never take more than two bottles myself, though once I drank two and a half, and a strange thing happened. Shall I tell you what it was? I was right up in the North of India among the mountains. I was in a valley among them. Great peaks of snow that were gathered round me and looking down on me, as gods might examine a beetle.

"I felt that Fate might be looking at them, as they were looking at me. I had gone there because I had just bought a new racing-car, and I wanted to see how far I could go in twelve hours. Once I touched a hundred, and that was on a kutcha road: on a good road I could do more, and I often did. I loved speed in those days, when I was young. It is a glorious thing. Sometimes I drive a bit now, just to see if I can still keep her over a hundred on a good road, if only for a few minutes, but in somebody else's car. I sold mine long ago.

"Well, I was driving South again through this valley, a wild place of rocks and a few bamboos and a little stream. I don't think it could ever have seen a good racing car before. It was in the summer, and I looked at the stream and thought how cool its water must be, coming down straight from the snow. And then I saw a girl with a pitcher of earthenware, that she had just filled at the stream, and she was drinking out of it.

"The affairs of the mind, I don't think you care about them as we do. But I think a picture will sometimes be made on the mind by the sunlight, and there it stays all your life. Perhaps you don't bother with such things. But one of those pictures came then, in fact the only one I have had. And it doesn't blur, as time blurs material things. It is still there. It is the picture of a slender girl in a saree the colour of morning glory, drinking that snow water.

"I thought of towns and of my brother's dancing-girls, and then of the life that I led myself; and all these things suddenly faded, and all that my thoughts could see was this girl in her blue saree drinking the water from the snows, and those grave peaks looking down from their loneliness at the valley. That picture is still there. Do you not think differently from us? Do you ever sit for a few hours and contemplate? I think your thoughts move quicker and are more varied. Mine are sometimes worried too. Very. But then I think of that picture of the slender girl by the stream, and my thoughts grow calm again as the mountains.

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"Well, I said to the girl, 'Come south with me to my brother's State. My car can do over a hundred on a good road. You shall see it do it.'

"I had a little palace then, not far from the palace of my brother. She cannot have known up there in the hills what India was like; she cannot have known its people; she cannot have known how we lived. I gave her no time to make up her mind. But what is time? We looked at each other and she came. What could I have been to her? I don't know. Something mysterious out of the South. To me she was all that we have lost in towns and in palaces and in modern days. All we have lost. Streams that have never known towns; mountains that have never heard noise. And a great deal more. Your Eden is lost too, is it not?"

"I believe so", I said. "But do you mean that the girl got straight into your car? Did she not at least say goodbye to her family first, whoever they were?"

His face shone three times with the glow of his cigar and went back into darkness, before he spoke again.

"Yes," he said, "it was like that. She left that mountain stream with me and we drove into the plains. Once for a mile or two I got up to a hundred and ten. She had never seen a car before. On the kutcha roads of course I could not often do anything like a hundred; but I raised a cloud of dust that was two miles long, and that shows you that I kept a pretty good pace. Never even seen a motor before.

"All this was in the early morning, and we crossed the border of my brother's State about nightfall, when all the peacocks were screaming and the green parrots flying home, and men were saying with flutes what they could not say with words, and one or two stars were shining in a green sky. I was driving to my little palace among the trees, that was called Prince's Koti. I was eager to show her things that she had never seen before. My little palace was full of them. But mostly, I wanted her to bring to it that calm that slept in the cool of the mountain stream, and the blessing of the great peaks, and all the serenity there was in those valleys. But I fear I speak of things that your country does not value. Pardon me if I do."

What could I say? At one moment he was telling of a hundred and ten miles an hour on Indian roads in a racing car, and at another of the serenity of the hills. He was so far beyond me in both of these things that I could only puff at my cigar. When he mixed them up together it was as bewildering as mixed drinks. So I quoted a French proverb, knowing he did not know French. And he went on.

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"We were driving in that calm light, that was rapidly dying, to my little palace," he said, "when most unfortunately I saw my brother. He was standing beside the road. I never knew why. It was of course no use asking, because too many people would have been sure to know."

"Sure to know?" I said. "You mean not to know."

"No," he said, "they would have known. And then it would have been their duty not to reveal it. No, I never knew why he was there. But there he was, and I stopped the car and made the proper obeisances. You know that we are of divine blood, and the divinity is all in him. And he smiled at me. Oh yes, he smiled. But then he smiled at her. I looked at her face to see the answering smile that would blast my happiness for ever; one glance aside as I stood facing my brother, with my hands towards him in the correct attitude, which is that of prayer.

"Everything was still as the evening. And then the smile did not come. She looked towards him pleasantly; but she did not smile. It was over in a flash. My happiness was not blasted. She preferred my love alone, to being one of his dancing girls. But he never forgave it. He was the Maharajah. The girl was in his State, and she refused to be his. She had said nothing. Nor had he. But he could see that she preferred me to the Maharajah; I who was nobody; and it was an insult. You are taught in your Book to forgive insults. We are not. So what could he do?

"What he did do was to invite us both to dinner, to take place without delay, and to have a jolly evening and drink to my return to the State. Well, there was nothing for it but to accept. It used to be death to disobey the Maharajah in the old days and, though the British rather frowned on the custom, we did not like to forget it altogether.

"Well, we went to the Palace, she and I and he, and he commanded a dinner, and it was brought, and she ate meats and fruits that she could never have tasted before, and they were served on our old plates, the ones that had rubies set in the gold of the rims. And the legend of the origin of those plates is more wonderful than the rubies. And when the plates had been taken away, he said, 'Now, we will drink to your return and to those two evening stars that you have happily brought with you.'

"She did not hide her eyes at all, but she did not say they were his. And he made a sign, and four bottles of champagne were brought in. Well, I thought, that is one for each of us and a bit over. But will Nahuriar, that was the girl whom I saw by the snowy water in that wild valley, will she touch any of this? It will only be for the Maharajah and me. Two bottles, I said. I could just do it, and drive away with Nahuriar after dinner.

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"And then a small flagon of port was brought in, and put beside his highness. My brother was only going to drink port! I should have to drink two bottles. And what would happen to her? I was thinking this, when four more bottles were brought in. Yes, four more. I saw then that he meant to kill me and Nahuriar when I drove away with her, because she would not stay in his palace."

"To kill you and her? How?" I asked.

"Why, because he knew I could never bear to drive at under sixty at any time," he said. "And with all that champagne in me he knew I would drive at a hundred, and not be able to do it. No man could. And then I thought we were both as good as dead."

"But why couldn't you have driven at ten miles an hour?" I said. And it seemed an obvious question for me to have asked. But no, there was something I could not understand. For he shrugged his shoulders, as far as I could see in the dark, and merely said, "Oh, no. I could never do that." Three powerful motives seemed to be working in him; love, and some deep appreciation of the serenity of Nature, and a yearning to drive a motor at over a hundred miles an hour, that was just as strong in him as any other emotion he had.

"Then why not have refused to drink the champagne at all," I said.

And the shadow of an old fear seemed to show in the glow of the cigar on his face. "Oh, no, I couldn't have done that," he said.

He never told me why. But I saw that, whatever the reason, he was sure about that. Whatever it was, I saw that he was more afraid of refusing the drink than he was of killing himself and his girl, by smashing his racing car on the road at night.

"I looked at Nahuriar," he went on, "and to my great surprise I saw her drinking the iced champagne just as she had drunk the water that the stream brought down from the snow. Every time I finished my tumbler, for we were drinking from large tumblers, it was refilled at once by a khitmagar, and the Maharajah's eyes were on me, I could not avoid them, and I had to drink!"

That is what he said. Sometimes his talk got too deep for me. And it was too deep there. He may have thought that, with all that divine blood in the family, there may have been some magical power of which I know nothing. But I do not even know from what gods they believed that they were descended. It's hard to say what he thought. I can only tell you whatever he told me, sitting on that verandah, while jackals, that always sound nearer than they are, gave with their cries more weirdness to the night, and to the voice of my Indian friend still talking of those eight bottles,

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so many of which were still full, and that, however silly it may seem to us, threatened him and the girl with death.

"And now I saw that the girl from the valley under the snows was drinking level with me. With amazement I saw it. I had drunk over two bottles, and she must have had the same. I paused for a moment, and in that moment, or very little more, she drank off two tumblers, and then my brother's eyes were on me again and I had to drink more. So did she. The end seemed near. Now I had drunk nearly two and a half bottles; and I knew that another tumbler, and I should run the car off the road, which was only a bit of flat sand, right into the jungle, and Nahuriar and I would be crushed against the nearest tree. I could not have done it by day, let alone by night.

"And then the Maharajah rose up and went out of the room. Astonishing as it may seem, Nahuriar had now drunk her four bottles empty. I couldn't have believed it. But she had. But what was I to do? There was a full bottle before me, and one half full, and I couldn't drink even the half and steer a car. I knew he would not leave us together for more than one or two minutes. When he came back I should have to drink what remained, and then I and the girl would be killed."

"But why on earth?" said someone to Jorkens.

"It's no use asking me why," said Jorkens; "why he should drink or why he should kill the girl and himself. He merely thought both were inevitable. I am only telling you what he told me . . ."

"With his eyes on me I had to," Sharudah went on. "I had a minute or two to rest. That was all. And then, Nahuriar said 'Can I help you?'

"'Why, yes,' I said, astonished although I was. For I thought she was going to share with me. And then I knew that not even that would help. I couldn't drink any more and remain sober. And then I saw her filling a tumbler and drinking it, and filling another and pushing the empty one over in front of me. She was standing up, straight and slender as I had seen her in the valley. She was quite unaltered, except that her pupils were larger and blacker, and there was something in them as though she saw what I could not see, and I thought it was the peaks of the Himalayas.

"When I saw what she was doing, it came to me for the first time that we might get away from the State alive, and I said, 'Be quick. He will be back in a minute.' And she filled the last tumbler, and as she drank it the door opened.

"'Thank you,' I said, as though she had been pouring out for me, and reached out my hand. There was only a tablespoonful left in it, as his highness came back to the room. I stood up and

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raised my tumbler and drank to him as he entered. I could just do it and keep my head. It was only a few drops. I swayed as I drank, and sat down suddenly. And he smiled, for I was pretending to be as drunk as he wished. It was my farewell drink to him.

"And, seeing me like that, he let us go, thinking we were going to our deaths, for he knew how I always drove. It is the only way to enjoy driving a car. But it is sudden death if you're drunk. And he thought I was, and that the insult would be avenged, and his gods glad. And another wineglassful, let alone a tumbler, and I should have been all that I was pretending.

"It was a near thing. And Nahuriar stood there as we both rose to go, as calm as I had seen her beside that mountain stream; all but her eyes, which were more than ever like two stars in the clear air above her native peaks. A last look the Maharajah flashed at her, like lightning shot from his eyes. But her eyes shone on unmoved as those stars in the cold. 'Very well,' he said. 'I tell you goodbye. And a happy journey.'

"It was a happy journey. We went away through the warm night, over the plains and past the blackness of sleeping jungles. I did not go to my little palace, but over my brother's borders, far from his State, where he would not be allowed to kill or seize us. Once for nearly a mile I got up to a hundred and twenty. The apple-green eyes of panthers and jungle cats shone at us, beetles hit our wind-screen and melted, our pace made the night cool. Till dawn, we drifted through it, seeming to fly. I sold my racing car, and some rings that I had, and bought this little house. And here we have lived ever since.

"Nahuriar," he said, raising his voice, "you remember that drive?" "No," came hers from an inner room, "I slept all the way."

* * *

RELATIVE VALUES

One day Albert Einstein was playing his violin while his friend, Artur Rubinstein, was accompanying him. For a time all went well. Then, in one part of the composition, the mathematician had difficulty keeping time with the piano. At first Rubinstein politely restrained himself, but finally he stopped playing, turned round and sternly addressed his friend.

"Albert, can't you count? One, two, three, four! ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR!"

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ENFANT TERRIBLE

Happy those early dayes, when I
Shin'd in my Angel-infancy!

HENRY VAUGHAN

A pretty little episode happened at home today. The gardener's boy asked me if he might try his new axe on the old cherry-tree, which I often vainly urged mother to cut down. I said, "By all means." It appears that he misunderstood me and cut down the tree. My mother was about to send him away, but I went straight to her and said I would take the entire responsibility for the loss of the tree on myself as I had always openly advocated its removal and that the gardener's boy was well aware of my views on the subject. My mother was so much touched at my straightforwardness that she gave me some candy, a refreshment to which I am still partial. Would that the ushers at school could share her fine discrimination, her sound judgment, and her appreciation of character.

MAURICE BARING, *The Diary of George Washington*,
From *Unreliable History*

Intimations . . .

I recollect a nurse call'd Ann,
Who carried me about the grass,
And one fine day a fine young man
Came up, and kiss'd the pretty lass.
She did not make the least objection!
Thinks I, "Aha!
When I can talk I'll tell Mamma"
—And that's my earliest recollection.

FREDERICK LOCKER-LAMPSON

Phenomenal!

There bounded on to the stage . . . a little girl in a dirty white frock with tucks up to the knees, short trousers, sandaled shoes, white spencer, pink gauze bonnet, green veil and curl-papers . . . "This, sir," said Mr. Vincent Crummles, bringing the maiden forward, "this is the infant phenomenon—Miss Ninetta Crummles."
"Your daughter?" inquired Nicholas.
"My daughter—my daughter," replied Mr. Vincent Crummles; "the idol of every place we go into, sir. We have had compli-

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mentary letters about this girl, sir, from the nobility and gentry of almost every town in England."

"I am not surprised at that," said Nicholas; "she must be quite a natural genius."

"Quite a—!" Mr. Crummles stopped: language was not powerful enough to describe the infant phenomenon. "I'll tell you what, sir," he said; "the talent of this child is not to be imagined. She must be seen, sir—seen—to be ever so faintly appreciated. There; go to your mother, my dear."

"May I ask how old she is?" inquired Nicholas.

"You may, sir," replied Mr. Vincent Crummles, looking steadily at his questioner's face, as some men do when they have doubts about being implicitly believed in what they are going to say.

"She is ten years of age, sir."

"Not more?"

"Not a day."

"Dear me!" said Nicholas, "it's extraordinary."

It was; for the infant phenomenon, though of short stature, had a comparatively aged countenance, and had moreover been precisely the same age—not perhaps to the full extent of the memory of the oldest inhabitant, but certainly for five years. But she had been kept up late every night, and put upon an unlimited allowance of gin-and-water from infancy, to prevent her growing tall, and perhaps this system of training had produced in the infant phenomenon these additional phenomena.

CHARLES DICKENS,
The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby

Self-Sacrifice

Father, chancing to chastise
His indignant daughter Sue,
Said, "I hope you realise
That this hurts me more than you."

Susan straightway ceased to roar;
"If that's really true," said she,
"I can stand a good deal more;
Pray go on, and don't mind me."

HARRY GRAHAM, *Ruthless Rhymes For Heartless Homes*

Handicap

"I'm a Norphan, both sides," he would explain, with the air of one who had seen trouble.

H. G. WELLS, *Kipps*

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Bringing Them Up Right

" Lord knows, they wasn't very welcome, pore little innercents ; but now they *are* 'ere, we may as well bring them up right. And I will, too. It's to me advantage. Come another four years and I can begin makin' use of them."

" How ? " asked Flora, pausing at the door. Was a flaw about to disclose itself in the hitherto admirable character of the shawl ?

" Train the four of them up into one of them jazz-bands," replied Mrs. Beetle, promptly. " I seen in the *News of People* that they earns as much as six pounds a night playin' up West in night-clubs. Well, I thought, here's a jazz-band ready-made to me 'and, as you may say ; and it's better still now there's four of them. I've got 'em all under me 'and in one family, so's I can keep an eye on the lot of them while they're learning to play. So that's why I'm bringing them up right, on plenty of milk, and seein' they get to bed early. They'll need all their strength if they 'ave to sit up till the cows come 'ome playin' in them night-clubs."

STELLA GIBBONS, *Cold Comfort Farm*

Cradle Song

Away with bloodshed, I love not such,
But Jane Eliza snores too much.

I bought a serpent that bites and stings
For three-and-sixpence or four shillings.

When Jane Eliza began to snore
I put it under her bedroom door.

The serpent had neither bit nor stung,
It had only just put out its tongue,

When Jane Eliza fell out of bed
And bumped upon it and killed it dead.

It showed off none of its pretty tricks
That cost four shillings or three-and-six ;

It had no time to sting or bite
Nor even to utter the words " Good night."

So three-and-sixpence at least is gone,
And Jane Eliza, she stills snores on.

A. E. HOUSMAN

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CARNIVAL

It was his dream all over again!

by PETER NIVEN

MARDI Gras . . .

The flower-burdened coaches and drays; the grotesque, oversize figures, obscenely hilarious; the heaving, swarming mass with nothing human in it, possessed by a demon capricious and pregnant with mischief; Norman Morrow hated it all.

He swung his car round in a detour to avoid the crowds, the whole sham festivity. It had to be his luck, he thought bitterly, that the man he must do business with should seemingly be the sole inhabitant of New Orleans to elect to continue working today.

He found a car park on the outer fringe of the mob. There appeared to be nothing for it but to get out and walk the rest of the way. He locked the car doors carefully. He stood a moment polishing his glasses. There was an excited shout and four or five youngsters bore down upon him.

"He's just right! Look at those shoulders!"

"He's just the right height, too!"

They swarmed round him, whooping. They were joined by others shouting approbation. Arms seized him, pulled him along. He let himself be taken. He knew what he would find round the corner, in the alley behind the car park. It was his dream all over again. A laughing girl, dressed to represent a rabbit, told him, "It's René . . . his shoulders are too narrow for the harness. It keeps slipping down and the whole thing looks awful!"

He made an effort to resist them, now. But his thick, stocky body was pliant in the eager hands of so many. They led him to the dummy. It lay in the alley, a huge papier-mâché monstrosity painted in colours he could only think of as bilous. His protests were drowned in laughter as they manhandled him into the linen trousers that comprised the lower part of the figure.

Foreshortened as it was by nearness, Morrow could see that it was intended to represent a lecherous old roué. And the man who had modelled it was unquestionably an artist in his craft. Then the huge body was hoisted over his shoulders. Hands adjusted the harness, pulled here, tugged there, tied things round his waist.

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"Keep pulling the strings! It doesn't matter which order. Just keep pulling them!"

He found himself obeying. The effect must have been all that was intended, judging by the laughter that greeted his efforts. Then again he was seized and many arms jostled him along, towards the main stream, the procession.

In front of his eyes was a small square of gauze for him to see through. But he could not see. Somewhere in the scrimmage he had lost his glasses. He called for them to stop but they could hear nothing above their own laughter. He tried to halt in his tracks but they pushed him inexorably onwards. Then he started to jerk madly at the strings which actuated the features of the dummy, hoping to attract attention. At this they laughed more raucously, someone yelling that he was a good sport.

Then abruptly he was alone. Or so it seemed to him for a moment. He stood still. Then he was caught in a vortex of bumps and pushes. He spun round and round maintaining precarious balance. He knew what had happened. He was now in the procession amid scores of figures such as his.

He blundered on, trying to see. He bent as much as he could in the constricted space, feeling for his glasses. They might be somewhere inside the figure. He bumped into something else. There was a terrific roar of applause from the crowds. For the roué had boomps-a-daisy'd an incredibly starchy dowager.

Morrow felt his skin tightening about him, prickling him; and there was a singing in his ear-drums. He opened his collar and freed his tie which gave him momentary relief. Then the belt round his waist began to cut into him so that his breath came in short, noisy spurts. He flapped his arms about inside his prison, seeking escape.

Another figure crashed into him and fended him off roughly. The crowd yelled its appreciation as the ponderous roué stumbled to its knees. Very slowly, the bloated, rakish face of the dummy swung earthwards; its eyebrows arching roguishly as Morrow clutched at the strings. Willing hands hoisted him to his feet amid cheers.

"Let me out! Let me out!" he screamed at them. "I'm blind . . . I can't see!"

He had put up such a good show that everyone was extolling him too enthusiastically for his cries to reach them. He struggled madly with the complicated harness and desisted only when he realized that he was simply tightening it about himself.

If only he could *see* . . . Surely someone less drunk with revelry would notice his plight?

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A thick compounding of fear and rage welled up in him. He began to kick out with his feet at his tormentors. The laughter crescendoed. His hands, for balance, were holding on to the strings and the wide mouth opened and closed, the eyes ogled hideously, the brows shot up and down in leering drollery.

Sweat was running from him, drenching his clothes, stinging his useless eyes. He beat wildly with his balled fists against the stout papier-mâché walls and the sound of his drumming came back to his ears like jungle tom-toms. Sobs choked in his throat.

He kicked out harder. The revellers took their cue and started a crude, bucking dance, improvising their steps on his. Some of them took hold of the gangling arms of the dummy and pirouetted him round. Then, after a few turns, they abruptly let him go. Those nearest him heard his cries as his toes teetered for balance, raising little whiffs of yellow dust. They thought he was yelling encouragement to them and they cheered back. They threw streamers over him. To his taut nerves the wisps of paper that coiled about his legs were leathern thongs to bind him. He was among devils.

He ran . . . He ran . . .

In its fall the left eye of the figure had sustained a gash and now through it came the wind that Morrow was creating by his flight, steadying the structure so that he did not lose balance. The main procession was now some distance away from him. But his own followers ran after him, calling to him that he was going the wrong way. They tried to head him off, but Morrow was now panic-ridden. He charged through them; ran on. And a lightness entered his heart. His feet had never been so fleet. He was taking strides longer than himself, wider than the world. He could not stop. He did not want to stop. He felt safe for the first time since he had donned this monstrosity. Safe and free . . .

His speed exhilarated him. He wanted to sing. Then his feet were on grass; soft and springy turf. Dimly he heard shouts behind him. The note of alarm penetrated his consciousness. He tried to slow down. He could not. Then somehow his hand fumbled in the breast pocket of his jacket. He felt his spectacles.

Quickly he hooked them over his ears. It took his eyes a few seconds to adjust themselves. He would see again.

All he could see was the sky. There was nothing under his feet. He gave a great cry as he knew he had stepped over the edge of the cliff; two hundred feet above jagged rocks lapped by a Prussian blue sea.

Sunlight was streaming through the hotel windows. Morrow blinked dazedly at it, lay perfectly still, letting the perspiration

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run from him. His wife straightened out the sheets for him.

"That dream, again?" she smiled.

He took a second or two to answer. "And it was a beauty this time," he said. "Best of it was, at the start I sort of knew I was dreaming . . . And it's Mardi Gras today. I'm not budging from the hotel!" He laughed.

It was about eleven in the morning that there was a phone call for him. He came back with a frown. "That idiot Jansen . . . Wants to see me this morning as he's flying out tomorrow. Must be the only soul working here today!"

"Well, get it over, dear. Then we can go and watch the fun." She added, laughing, "And don't get caught up in that dream of yours!"

"No fear . . . no one's going to get me inside one of those dummies."

He swung his car round in a detour to avoid the crowds. He found a car park on the outer fringe of the mob. There appeared to be nothing for it but to get out and walk the rest of the way. He locked the car doors carefully.

He stood there a moment polishing his glasses. There was an excited shout and four or five youngsters bore down upon him.

"He's just right! Look at those shoulders!"

"He's just the right height, too!"

They swarmed round him, whooping. They were joined by others shouting approbation. Arms seized him, pulled him along . . .

* * *

EMBARRAS DE RICHESSE

A good example of Sydney Smith's talent for cumulative nonsense is his comment on the report that a young gentleman was about to marry a widow who was twice his age and of very ample person.

"Marry her? Impossible!" said Smith. "A part of her perhaps—he couldn't marry all of her by himself. There's enough of her to furnish wives for a whole parish. You might people a colony with her, or give an assembly with her, or take your morning's walk round her provided there were frequent resting-places and you were in rude health. Or you might read the Riot Act and disperse her. In short you might do anything with her but marry her."

GERALD BULLETT, *Sydney Smith*

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★*The carefree garrison of peacetime Gibraltar may laugh at rumours of a threat from the Emperor of Morocco; but not so Captain Smith. For even a wild goose chase has its dangers and excitements—and its rewards!*

MISSION TO MOROCCO

by SHOWELL STYLES

MRS. JOHN SMITH received a letter from her son. It was dated 22 February 1788, and informed her, after assuring her of his health and filial affection, that he had applied to the Admiralty for permission to remain on the Gibraltar station for a further twelve months, "as there appears no prospect of a war at present." Mrs. Smith, while thanking God and Mr. Pitt that there was indeed no prospect of a war, wished that Sidney would put a term to his wanderings and find employment nearer home. She sat down resolutely in her Dover lodging and penned her reply.

Captain Smith read her words six weeks later and was a little perturbed. His mother begged him to come home, if only for a month or two. She proposed to rent a small house near Buckland; but how she was to manage it now that old Caldwell, who had been their servant so many years, was dead, she did not know. If only Sidney would leave his wandering for a little all would be well.

Of this letter the news of old Caldwell's death seemed to Captain Smith the most pertinent part. He did not feel that his own return to England would solve any problem, but he disliked the thought of his mother being without a reliable servant and major-domo. He considered long, but without arriving at a solution, various means whereby he might provide her with this necessity.

Gibraltar in April was a pleasant place enough. Ashore the messes of the garrison officers, afloat the wardrooms of the ships of His Majesty's squadron, entertained Captain Smith and found him —at first—amusing. In whatever company he found himself he was always postulating the possibility of attack and inquiring how it would be met.

He told the infantry of an undefended gully on the east side of the Rock which, he contended, could be scaled by enemy seamen; he showed the sailors (with marshalled glasses on wardroom dinner-tables) how an enemy fleet might pen the squadron in Algeciras Bay.

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They laughed at him at first; but Captain Smith, though not devoid of humour, was deaf to laughter where plans of battle were concerned. Then they made him accompany them to balls and less formal amusements in Algeciras, where the friendly Spaniards entertained their late enemies with wine and song; but Captain Smith, though he drank his Xeres and kissed his dark-eyed Dolores with the rest, remained chiefly preoccupied with war.

It was then that the younger officers of the garrison perceived that this was a gift from the great god of Mirth. They put their ingenious heads together—three of them.

"It's a pity," said one gravely, "that so much zeal produces no bloodshed. It would be a kindness to find the man a war."

"Why not?" cried a second eagerly. "Hoax him, my boys—a night attack, a section of infantry in Spanish uniforms—"

"Muzzle your misfiring cannon," interrupted the third, a red-headed youth named Molloy. "You'll land us all in chokey, man. Subtlety's the note, and I'm the subtle lad for this game. Listen to me."

They listened. And the upshot was that a few days later Captain Smith was buttonholed on the Old Mole by an elderly seaman of respectable appearance who told how a member of his crew—by chance—had overheard, in the Moorish port of Laraiche, the rumour of an impending attack on Gibraltar by the Moors. Shortly after this incident (which excited Captain Smith without fully convincing him) the officers of a mess whose guest the captain happened to be discussed with unusual gravity the reported threatening attitude of the Emperor of Morocco towards Britain.

One Molloy, a red-headed lieutenant, was the gravest of them all. To him Captain Smith addressed eager inquiries and Molloy, eyeing his companion and seeing him already malleable, proceeded to push him under the hammer he had prepared.

"The fact is, sir," he said weightily, "there's only one man of rank on the Rock who realizes the danger. That's Colonel Doyle of the 60th. He's fought the Moors and knows 'em inside out—and he's always believed they'd attack some day."

The subtle Molloy had spoken the truth about his final card. Doyle was a veteran whose rugged mind was obsessed by one thing: the daily imminence of a Moorish assault.

Next day, Captain Smith, having learned that the Colonel had the guard on Middle Hill, climbed the precipitous path of zigzags by which cannon had been hauled up the Rock. A sentry challenged as he neared the narrow crest. A little higher, perched upon a jutting crag on the very summit of the Rock, he spied Colonel Doyle.

Doyle turned, a small red-faced man whose eye had that brooding

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vacancy which may be seen in the eyes of babies and madmen.

"You're welcome to my watch-tower, sir," were his first words to the newcomer; and his second, "They're not in sight yet."

"The Moors, sir?"

"The Moors, captain. Not by day, you'll understand—'tis not their devilish way. But one night. Tonight, it may be." He shut his mouth suddenly and darted a wary glance at the other. "You'll be thinking I'm mad, I dare say."

"On the contrary, colonel," said Captain Smith earnestly. "I think I may have found a sane man. This garrison believes itself secure. I believe otherwise. I have heard much to support that belief, and I come to you for information, since I am told you—"

"And you're right, sir!" exploded the little colonel, his pale eyes alight. "They're asleep, sir—aye, fleet and all! If they knew what I know—but we must talk, sir, we must talk! I've maps in my quarters."

He led the way to the little hut which was his temporary home, and presently wellnigh buried himself and his visitor beneath a mound of maps, papers, and sketch-plans of attack and defence.

When, two hours later, Captain Smith set foot upon the downward zigzags his stride was eager and purposeful; and as soon as he was out of sight of the soldier on duty at the top of the path he began to run.

It was a fortnight later when such fish as contrived to live in the waters of Tangier harbour—and they were few, for the waters were most foul—had the new experience of being fished for by night. The night activities of the inhabitants of Tangier were normally other than piscatorial. The fish may have been surprised. The more knowing among them were probably intrigued to discover, on investigating the line that descended from the moonlit surface to their domestic mud, that it had a sinker, but neither hook nor bait.

At the other end of the line was a felucca, a clumsy craft that yet was turned to beauty by the beauty of the night. The houses on shore, mean and ugly by day, glowed like pearls in a radiance that was bright enough to reveal the features of the two men in the felucca.

One of them, a skinny fellow black-skinned and glinting-eyed, sat huddled in his enveloping *burnous* on the thwart amidships, leaning silent and motionless on his oars while his companion handled line and sinker. This second man wore the white *burnous* and headdress like the first, but his beak-nosed faced showed paler than the other's. To Abder Rahman, the boatman, he had disclosed that he was an Arab from Ceuta, of Spanish descent, Ali ben Tounis. Abder Rahman had one interest only—the acquisition of money;

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and with this Ali ben Tounis appeared well supplied. He made no comment on Ali's odd notions of fishing, and obeyed sluggishly and in silence when, as happened every ten minutes, he was bidden to row farther across the harbour.

Ali ben Tounis had landed from a coasting vessel at Mogador twelve days earlier and had thence made a journey northward along the Atlantic seaboard of Morocco by land and sea, enjoying himself immensely. At the ports of Laraiche, Salee and Santa Cruz he had pursued his strange sport of night fishing in the harbours, and the fruits of his labours were inscribed in a tattered notebook in an inner pocket of his robes. Tangier was to be his final port. On the morrow he would take ship for Gibraltar and, once more washed and breeched, become Captain Sidney Smith of His Majesty's Navy.

That he ran some risk is undeniable. The Emperor of Morocco and his kaids had no love for the English ; had they discovered one of the hated *feringhees* taking soundings in their harbours there would have been an end of Captain Smith.

He hauled in his line, which was knotted at every half-fathom, and glanced at his marks ; a feathery palm in line with the pale dome of the mosque, a jutting quay below the fort that guarded the eastern arm of the harbour.

" Pull ten strokes, my friend," he told the boatman.

He took his last sounding and coiled the line. A little breeze had sprung up, ruffling the moonlit water. With his back to the boatman he was hastily noting the last three soundings in his tattered notebook when a wayward drift of air caught a loose leaf and blew it to the feet of his companion. Abder Rahman picked it up and returned it in silence ; but the moonlight had shown him what he recognized as *feringhee* characters on the scrap of paper. The boatman's dark face remained expressionless. Only his little eyes glinted more brightly, as they usually did when he perceived a possibility of gain.

" Thy work is finished for this night," said Ali ben Tounis. " Row to the quay."

He attached no importance to the fact that the man had seen that piece of paper ; a Moorish boatman, he reasoned, was unlikely to be capable of putting a meaning to a few scribbled figures, even if he knew what they were. It was unfortunate for Captain Smith that Abder Rahman had laboured in the victualling yard at Gibraltar for six months some years before, had seen lists of stores, had watched a damaged frigate sounding her way into the shallows of Algeciras Bay.

The felucca nosed alongside the quay and Abder Rahman made fast to a bollard. Ali ben Tounis, having clambered ashore as nimbly as a cat for all his hampering *burnous*, stood waiting. He had a lodging in the foul-smelling stone hovel, in one of the twisting alleys above the harbour, in which Abder Rahman lived with his

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brother the basket-weaver. But Abder Rahman desired him to go on alone ; he had a repair to make, he said, to his mooring-rope. So Ali ben Tounis turned and disappeared into the inky shadows of the alleys.

Abder Rahman watched him go. Then he climbed to the quay and made straight for the least wretched of the streets debouching on the quay, a street that ran uphill past the Kasbah to the dwelling of the Kaid of Tangier.

In his cramped and stinking quarters Captain Smith pushed back the banded headdress of Ali ben Tounis and peered at his scribbled figures. His room was a square box of stone with a narrow door and a span-wide slit of window unglazed and giving on to the alley.

He closed the tattered notebook and thrust it into its hiding-place in the sole of his sandal. His work was done. He lay down on a straw pallet, blew out the lamp, and prepared for such sleep as the smaller denizens of his bed would allow.

Sleep was slow in coming. He turned his thoughts to the morrow and his departure. There was a vessel sailing with a cargo of hides for Algeciras, and he had bargained with her master for a passage. At Algeciras he would find his proper clothes and a welcome at the house of a Spanish gentleman ; that had been arranged by Colonel Doyle. Then, he supposed, he would ride to Gibraltar and take up life with the garrison—until the war with Morocco came to bring him more active employment . . .

The thud of many feet in the alley, a loud order in Arabic, brought him to full wakefulness. He had barely time to sit up before the door was flung open unceremoniously and a man stepped in followed by a torch-bearer.

The intruder was a big man, so big that he seemed to fill the little room. In the smoky glare of the torch he looked a very Goliath. His face was almost hidden behind a square black beard, and his steel casque scraped the ceiling with its spike as he stood menacingly over the captain. The great curved sword at his side rubbed against bare brown calves.

" In the name of Allah and the most beneficent Kaid ! " he pronounced in sonorous Arabic. And then, lapsing into *lingua franca*, " Up with you, O son of evil ! The Kaid will lodge you this night—in the Kasbah ! "

Ali ben Tounis, outraged dignity in a none-too-clean *burnous*, got slowly to his feet and folded his arms. Looking the giant in the eye, he observed the inflamed rim and distorted pupil that betokened the *hashish* addict.

" What have I done, O soldier of the Kaid ? " he demanded angrily. " I, a merchant of Ceuta, am about my business in your

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town, a guest such as the Prophet bids you honour. Am I to be dragged from my lodging—? "

"If Allah wills it," broke in the other shortly. "Or you may walk upon two legs to the Kasbah. As to honour, you have an officer of the Kaid's guard to escort you. Come!"

He reached a muscular arm to grasp his prisoner, but Ali ben Tounis, stepping aside, walked with dignified resignation to the door. As he crossed the threshold he heard behind him a curious thing. There came a scuffle and a clank—the soldier colliding in the doorway with the torch-bearer—and then, "Lubberly knave!" growled the Kaid's officer in broad English.

Captain Smith doubted his ears. But he was given no time to think. Four men in helmet and corselet closed round him, swords drawn and stiffly held. The big man rapped an order in Arabic. With the torchbearer lighting their way up the winding alley and the officer striding in the rear they moved swiftly with their prisoner.

The captain marshalled his thoughts as he trudged along in their midst. That Abder Rahman had betrayed him was clear. He realized his present danger. The Kaid, whether he found Ali ben Tounis to be a *feringhee* or not, was more than likely to make sure of him by removing his head. But the Kaid's officer had spoken English words, and with an accent that proved they were no mere phrase picked up in some alien port. That meant he was an Englishman and therefore a possible source of help in his present predicament.

But dared he risk a demand for help? To reveal himself as an English officer was to burn his boats with a vengeance. The big man was probably a renegade sworn to the Kaid's service. Would he not do better to preserve his disguise and trust to luck for a chance of escape?

His decision was still unmade when the little troop came out of the close black alleys on to an open space on the hill-slope. They halted before a pointed archway filled with a massive door, and the big officer banged upon it with the hilt of his scimitar. It opened at once and Captain Smith and his escort marched in. The interior was chill as a tomb. With the flaring torch preceding them they passed swiftly along bare stone passages and down a short flight of steps to a door with an iron grille and a heavy iron lock. Captain Smith was thrust inside. The Kaid's officer took the torch from his henchman and followed the prisoner into his cell to cast a keen glance at its utter bareness.

Captain Smith seized the opportunity of light and ran his eye quickly round his prison, hoping for some prospect of escape. There was none. The place was windowless.

"Allah bring you soft dreams, O merchant of Ceuta," said his

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captor ironically. "The Kaid will send for you in the morning. He will provide you with a deeper sleep."

He turned to go. Captain Smith took his decision.

"You'll see a fellow-countryman done to death?" he said in a low voice.

The big man swung round.

"An Englishman?" he said, in a deep whisper. "What the fiend are ye doing here?"

"I'm on the King's business." Captain Smith spoke with more confidence. "I demand your assistance, whoever you are. If you allow—"

"Stow your gab!" whispered the other fiercely.

He strode to the door and barked an order in Arabic. Heavy steps receded into silence. The big man came back to the captain.

"See here, my bully," he said, scowling down at him, "I'm a cap'n of the guard here. I do my dooty by them as pays me."

"Your duty is to your King," said the captain.

"God save your ignorance! I've no king, master merchant! I'm a free man, and I'm trusted. Titus Wright never betrayed a trust yet!"

"A plain lie, Mr. Wright," said Captain Smith, his eyes steady on the big angry face. "It's in my mind that you're a deserter from a King's ship."

The other exploded in an oath. "What if I am, damn ye? Haven't I made my own way here? Haven't I won promotion among these black heathen? If I let ye loose I lose what I've won, d'ye see?"

"I see this, Mr. Wright. That if I'm taken before the Kaid in the morning you'll have the murder of an Englishman on your soul—and more. I'm Captain Sidney Smith of His Majesty's Navy and I carry information of prime importance to our country. If you fail to assist me with every means in your power, you'll be a double traitor."

"It'll mean torture for me, belike!" cried the man, tugging at his beard.

"Very well. If you're afraid, Mr. Wright, keep me for your Kaid to slaughter. I ask only this of you, and I ask it in the name of the King you've forsworn. See that this comes to English hands in Gibraltar."

The captain stooped and pulled the tattered notebook from its place in his sandal. He held it out. The other made no move to take it. He stood gnawing his fingers and staring at Captain Smith.

"Listen here," he said fiercely, pushing his beard almost into the captain's face. "Eleven year ago I was a gardener down in Kent, Folkestone way. I was pressed—cozened aboard a King's ship,

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bullied and bruised, cursed day and night. I swum ashore one night off Oran. I walked here on my two feet and got my job by breaking the neck of the Kaid's pet wrestler. The Kaid, he's a black heathen but he's done me fair. Who's to have my loyalty, master captain of a King's ship ? "

" Your King is your King," said Captain Smith.

" King George ? All he ever gave me was kicks and salt beef. The Kaid gives me wine and good food and two wives—"

" And *hashish*, my friend ? " interrupted the other softly in Arabic.

Titus Wright glared and then looked away.

" Give me two hours," he muttered, and was gone.

In a lightless stone box a dozen feet long by half a dozen wide there was nothing to do but think. Captain Smith thought of Titus Wright, the renegade ; of his huge muscles, of his obvious competence, of his once having been a gardener in Kent. And—dependent on circumstances—he registered a vow.

But at the back of his mind there nagged an odd sense of having at some time, somewhere, met with this renegade giant before. For some curious reason the man's square-cut face conjured up a picture of another face, thin and with a protruding lower lip—the face of Mr. Horatio Nelson, whom he had not seen since that evening eleven years ago in the Dolphin Inn at Portsmouth . . .

Portsmouth ! He had it now. Titus Wright was the big man who had put up so fierce a fight against the press-gang of which Mr. Midshipman Smith had been nominally in command.

Captain Smith pondered the strange ways of Providence for the next hour.

The grating of the key in the lock was the first warning he had of Wright's coming. No light followed the opening of the door, but Wright's deep whisper sounded in the dark.

" Come you here. Stretch out your hand. So—now catch a hold of my wrist. Follow—and not a word out of ye if you'd save your neck and mine ! "

The captain obeyed without a murmur. He was led through darkness like that of the Pit, along stone corridors and up a flight of steps. Another passage, and suddenly Wright halted, loosing his companion's wrist. A lock groaned, a small door swung on its hinges, and they were out in what seemed to the captain a blinding brilliance. The moon was sinking, but ninety minutes in pitch darkness had rendered his eyes unnaturally sensitive.

They were under the high wall of the Kasbah, with an open space of moonlit ground between them and the nearest houses. No living thing was in sight.

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" Quick, now ! " said Wright.

He led the way at a run across the open. Smith, following, saw that he had exchanged the barbaric uniform of the Kaid's guard for a voluminous *burnous*. They gained the shadow of the sleeping houses and plunged into an alley that ran downhill between dark eyeless walls.

" Ye'll have money, I suppose ? " Wright grunted.

" Yes. A sufficiency. Why so ? "

" For a boat. I've got one for ye. It'll take ye to Algeciras, and you're to sail soon as ye get aboard."

" Listen to me, Wright," said Captain Smith suddenly, as they turned a corner. " Come with me to Algeciras. I'll see you get safely home to Kent."

" Ha ! And be lashed to death for desertion ? " the man sneered. " I'm no fool, my bully ! "

" And yet," Captain Smith meditated aloud, " you take the risk of bringing me to my boat. Why not have left me to make my own escape, once you'd freed me ? "

" Because if I'm to cheat the Kaid of a prisoner I'll see it's done thorough, d'ye see ! " Wright growled. " Thorough's my motter, and always was !—Careful here ! "

They had reached the debouchment on to the quay. Wright reconnoitred cautiously. Several feluccas lay alongside, their tall masts and yards a sparse forest against the dim stars. Wright made for one of them whose sail drooped in dark folds above her deck. The head and shoulders of a man, white teeth gleaming in a black face, rose above the quay's edge from the felucca's deck as they approached. Wright snapped half a dozen words at him and turned to Smith.

" Masti the Negro," he said. " Show him your blunt."

Captain Smith fumbled in his clothing and produced a narrow bag of soft leather. The Negro, seeing the glint of gold, grinned, nodded, and at once began to cast off his moorings.

" On board with ye ! " snarled Wright impatiently.

Captain Smith appeared to hesitate, dangling his money-bag.

" My friend," he said earnestly, " come with me. Leave your heathen masters, leave your *hashish* and the rest of your folly. England's your country—"

" Stow that gab and get aboard ! " Wright fairly bellowed at him.

" Mr. Wright," said the captain softly, " I am the mildest of men, but—" His voice changed suddenly. " Too late ! Look yonder—along the quay ! "

He pointed with a shaking left arm. Wright swung round quickly. Captain Smith swung the money-bag to the base of his skull. The big man grunted and fell in a heap.

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The captain bundled him over the edge of the quay into the felucca and stepped on board.

" Hasten, O black one ! " he called to the Negro, and shook the money-bag so that its contents clinked meaningly.

Masti the Negro grinned widely and pushed his craft from the quay.

The little wind of dawn sang its way along the pale sea furrows. The felucca, heeling under a brisk easterly wind, was transfigured from a clumsy thing of wood and canvas into a nymph of morning dancing across the vast marbled floor of the Middle Sea. Soon—in another hour or less—the Rock should be in plain sight.

Thus meditated Captain Smith, squatting in the stern-sheets and handling the heavy tiller with the ease of custom. In the bows, curled up on a heap of matting, the Negro, Masti, slumbered peacefully. Amidships, beneath the thwarts and still unconscious, lay Titus Wright. The captain had taken the precaution of lashing his wrists and ankles with some pieces of Masti's coir rope.

The east glowed and quivered from lucent green to pale gold. The sea, reflecting the mood of the sky overhead, turned swiftly to a deep blue flecked with dazzling white. Golden shafts stabbed upward from the level horizon, and suddenly the felucca's sail shone as though it had caught fire. Masti stirred and stretched himself, stood up in the bows, threw a quick glance round the horizon. He looked at Smith, grinned, and pointed ahead. Out of the sparkle of the waves, beyond the edge of the world, rose a sharp pinnacle of gold—the upper crest of the Rock. Nearer, three miles away, gleamed a speck of white.

Captain Smith beckoned Masti to take the tiller and went for'ard to rummage among the miscellaneous oddments of the felucca's gear. The best he could find was a battered straw hat. He leaned over the lee gunwale and scooped sea-water, flinging it into the face of the unconscious Wright. At the third hatful the big man stirred and groaned, opened bloodshot eyes, frowned and blinked owlishly about him. Then he drew breath. Captain Smith seated himself on the bow thwart and waited.

He was treated to a masterly demonstration of expletive. Arabic, Spanish, and English were called into play, and though half the oaths were unintelligible to Captain Smith (who knew a good many in all three languages) he was able to appreciate the thorough nature of his malediction. When the man at last fell silent, panting and wild-eyed, Captain Smith spoke to him coolly.

" I'm sorry, Wright," said he, " to be forced to tie you. You're a free man now, and I owe you my life. You'll thank me yet—"

Here Wright broke out again into fierce oaths, straining wrathfully at his bonds. Captain Smith waited until he was done.

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"I don't doubt, my man," he said then, more sharply, "that you fancy yourself ill done by. No more *hashish*—you are feeling the need for that filth now, perhaps."

"Damn and blast your eyes!" spat Wright.

"I excuse your language because I believe you'll regret it. You'll learn, my friend, that you're fit for better work than the service of a heathen emperor. I propose to teach you myself."

Captain Smith contemplated him a moment; the sunlight showed the shape of the big jaw beneath the square-cut black beard; the blue eyes, inflamed and furious under jutting brows, were yet honest and intelligent. From his prisoner he looked up to see the sail he had observed at sunrise. It was much nearer now, a frigate by her rig, shaping a course that would almost cut the felucca's. He knew her for the *Aurora*, Captain Messenger; and Messenger was by way of being a friend of his.

He called to Masti to bring the felucca nearer the wind. On that course they would cross the frigate's bows before many minutes had passed. Wright, hearing the order, lifted his head.

"A King's ship, Wright," nodded the captain cheerfully. "We're going to hail her and take passage."

The big man writhed in his bonds, his face distorted.

"You damned slaver!" There was fear as well as fury in his great voice. "Ye'd give me back to be flogged, would ye?"

"I'm glad to see you know the penalty for desertion, Wright," said Captain Smith reflectively. "It appears you've a sense of duty yet. As for me, my duty is to hand you over to be put in irons, as you clearly observe."

He eyed the frigate. She was a bare mile away now, a magnificent sight with her crowding canvas dazzling in the sun's level rays. To him she was the epitome of England.

And now Captain Smith did one of those fantastically unreasonable things which accorded with his odd character, a character (so his superiors held) unfitted for higher command; yet it was such things that caused men to love him. He strode to the Negro at the tiller and whipped the knife from Masti's belt. He returned to Wright and rapidly severed the bonds.

"Now, my man," said he, stepping back, "you've but to come past me to the helm, and you can put this craft about and head back to your dirty Kaid."

As he spoke he ripped the *burnous* and its linen undervest from him and stood naked to the waist, clad only in the baggy knee-pantaloons of the Arab, between the goggle-eyed Negro and the unbound Wright. The act of a fool undoubtedly—to stake all his winnings, including the precious notebook he believed to be vitally important to his country, upon a bout of fisticuffs in an open boat.

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A flagrant stepping aside from the straight path of Duty? Captain Smith did not find it so. He felt himself in great part responsible for Wright's predicament; the man owed his present heathen life, as a slave to *hashish* and Mahomet, to that visit of the press-gang eleven years ago. This was the captain's way of wiping out that debt.

Wright was heaving himself to his feet, slowly, incredulously. He had only to take four paces to wrest the tiller from the frightened Negro, to put the felucca about and head her back to Tangier. The one obstacle was a beak-nosed fellow of middle height who stood poised in the attitude of defence taught him by Gentleman Jackson, feet apart, left fist advanced, right fist guarding chin. There were muscles rippling under the smooth brown skin of this fellow, but Titus Wright had the advantage of height and was the heavier man by fifty pounds. A slow grin widened on his bearded face as he got to his feet.

"A word, my friend!" Captain Smith sang out as the other stood erect. "We've met before. You remember the press-gang in Portsmouth? I was the midshipman in command, Wright. You had little chance then. I'm giving you your chance now."

Wright's grin changed to a bewildered expression; and then to a scowl.

"By Mahound!" he growled between his teeth. "'Twas you that set them on me?"

The captain nodded coolly. "Don't keep me waiting, man!" he cried cheerily.

"God bless your impudence!" growled Wright (but there was answering humour in his blue eye), and launched himself at the captain.

A hard fist rattled on the side of his jaw, throwing him off balance. The captain's right thudded into his ribs. Wright's flailing blow whistled past Smith's left ear, and before he could bring in his left he was staggering backwards in an attempt to keep his feet on the sloping planks. He saved himself with a hand on the gunwale and once more flung himself forward, whirling both arms in a ferocious outward sweep to hurl aside the captain's rigid guard. For a moment Smith was uncovered to attack. Wright drove a fist like a ram at his opponent's body, a blow that would have ended the fight had it reached its mark fairly. But the captain, anticipating it, twisted sideways. Wright's knuckles grazed his left side, raising a crimson weal. Before the giant could recover two stinging blows battered at eye and nose. Blinking and bemused he staggered back, blood streaming across his beard.

"It's a hundred lashes for a deserter," remarked Captain Smith conversationally. "That is, if he lives to take 'em áll."

Wright grunted and for the third time lurched into the fight.

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This time, learning from his adversary, he came on with his fists held high, the left outstretched. The captain, staking all on the big man's reaction, made a feint blow with his right, leaving his chin uncovered. Wright's eyes gleamed as he took the other's fist on his forearm and swung mightily at the exposed jaw. Smith was barely in time with his sideways duck of the head. The tremendous blow ripped a patch of skin from his cheek as it passed. Then, at close quarters and within Wright's guard, he slammed both fists in succession to the mark, at the overhang of the lower ribs. Involuntarily Wright bent, his unprotected chin dropping forward. Captain Smith struck with every ounce of his strength at that bearded jaw. The man's head jerked backward ; he swayed an instant, toppled, and fell to the deck, the back of his skull striking against the thwart behind him.

The captain bent over him quickly. Wright moved and groaned. From a distance came a hail, high and angry. Smith straightened himself. He had had no eyes for the frigate in the last few minutes. Now he saw that she was very close, so close that her long bowsprit seemed about to pass overhead. Masti, clinging to the tiller in an ecstasy of wonder, had brought the felucca clean across the *Aurora's* bows.

A leap, and Smith was at the Negro's side, forcing up the tiller so that the felucca sheered away from the huge curve of the oncoming frigate's bows. He raised his clear voice in a yell.

" *Aurora* ahoy ! Heave-to for urgent dispatches ! "

The frigate's side was close above him now. He saw heads dodging above her rail ; a cocked hat and blue uniform appeared among them, craning over the side.

" Captain Messenger ! " Smith shouted. " Here's Sidney Smith to come aboard ! "

Then the *Aurora* had slipped past and the felucca was bobbing in the wake of her passage. He brought his craft up into the wind and put her on the starboard tack. As he did so the frigate backed her mainsail and lay hove-to a cable's length away.

Smith spared a glance for Wright. The man was sitting up and rubbing his head. He raised his eyes and met the captain's gaze.

" Reckon you win, cap'n," he growled. " It's a hundred lashes for Titus Wright."

His battered face twisted itself into a smile ; but it was a grim smile.

The *Aurora*'s rail was topped with a row of wondering faces as the felucca slid under the frigate's lee and sheered alongside with her lateen sail flapping. An officer yelled from the quarter-deck.

" Smith, by God ! What the deuce are you doing in a blackamoor's hooker ? "

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The captain waved a hand and thrust the tiller into the fist of the bewildered Negro. He picked up his discarded *burnous*, found his bag of money, and tossed a handful of coins into the boat's bottom. Then he turned and helped Wright to his feet. A rope ladder came whistling down from the frigate's rail.

" Follow," he ordered sharply, and jumped for the ladder.

With difficulty Wright hauled himself up and over on to the deck of the *Aurora*. He stood there bloody-faced and sullen in a circle of grinning tars, waiting the word that would send him to the punishment which was his lawful deserts. He heard an officer's voice: " In the name of wonders, Smith, what have you been up to? You're hurt, man! What—"

" It's nothing—a little trouble getting clear of the Moors."

" And this—this hulk of a fellow, he's with you? "

" Certainly. That's my servant, Titus Wright," said Captain Smith. " See that they look after him, will you, Captain? I owe him my life."

He linked his arm in the frigate captain's and walked away. Friendly seamen besought Wright to come below and take a nip of Jamaica. But Wright seemed at first not to hear them. His eyes were fixed on the retreating figure of Captain Smith; the seamen wondered to see tears in them.

A footman in scarlet livery tiptoed across the thick carpet and handed a packet, heavily sealed, to a gentleman in a maroon coat who sat at a table of polished mahogany. At a similar table on the opposite side of the big, elaborately furnished room a gentleman in a puce-coloured coat looked up inquiringly from his *Morning Herald*. The gentleman in maroon cut away the wrappings of the packet and smoothing out the budget of papers began to read them with a frown.

The gentleman in puce resumed his study of the *Morning Herald*. He was disturbed from this by a burst of wild laughter from the opposite desk. He frowned; he disapproved of laughter in the sacred precincts of the Admiralty.

" Must you cackle at this hour, Bellamy? " he inquired coldly.

" Gad, man—what do you think? " crowed the other, waving a paper. " We're to go to war with Morocco! "

" Nonsense. Pitt would have an apoplexy."

" Well, here's a gentleman who fairly commands us to attack the black emperor. Listen to this, my boy." He read aloud, with mock gravity. " ' The chief danger lies from the ports of Laraiche, Salee, Mogador and Santa Cruz, towards the Atlantic. A second separate squadron, therefore, to rendezvous and refit in Lagos Bay, appears necessary, which in my opinion need not consist of more than a

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fifty-gun ship, six frigates and sloops, and some small vessels—' "

" Who the devil wrote this ? " demanded the puce gentleman, laying his newspaper aside.

" Be quiet, man. The best's yet to come. ' The forty-four-gun ships, lately fitted as transports, appear to me a proper sort of ship for this service,' writes this methodical madman, ' their establishment, being that of a sloop, obviating the difficulty there might otherwise be of finding officers young enough to serve under the command of so young a one as I am ; I hope their Lordships will not consider this my inferiority of rank as an obstacle to grant me the honour I request—' "

" Great Mars and Neptune ! " ejaculated the puce gentleman. " Plans his own war, musters his own fleet, and gives himself the command ! Who in thunder is this fire-eater ? "

" Listen, Caulfield, listen ! '—the honour I request, but rather trust that what I want in professional experience and ability, will be made up by *local* knowledge and zeal for the public service. I have the honour to be Your most obedient humble servant, W. Sidney Smith.' Dated 30th April 1788," finished the maroon gentleman with a flourish.

" Fellow writes a good letter, is mad as a hatter, knows what ' obviate ' means. Qualifies him for a secretaryship, I should think."

" What shall I do with his damned idiotic soundings—burn 'em ? "

" No, no, no ! " The puce gentleman was shocked. " File 'em, Bellamy, file 'em—gives the clerks something to do. And that letter of his—keep it. Might be valuable some day. It's these mad fellows who get into the history books, y'know."

The maroon gentleman looked extremely doubtful.

" All the same," he frowned, " the fellow wants taking down a peg. Too much damned zeal—wasting our time with this rubbish. I wonder," he added suddenly, " if he had the impudence to use one of His Majesty's messengers to send this precious packet—? "

He reached out and tugged the velvet bell-pull that hung beside the desk. The footman was prompt to answer.

" Is the messenger who brought this still below stairs ? " demanded the maroon gentleman, holding up the papers.

" No, sir. He left at once, sir."

" Did he now. What sort of a fellow was he, eh ? King's runner, think you ? "

" Oh no, sir. Big rough-looking man—quiet-spoken, though, and dressed very neat in brown. Might be a vally, or such." The footman paused, and amended this verdict. " Come to think of it, he were more like a prize-fighter to look at than a vally."

" Indeed ? And he wouldn't wait ? " said the puce gentleman curiously.

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"No, sir. Said he was under orders to report to a Mrs. Smith at Dover, sir"—the footman allowed himself to smile—"to take soundings in the lady's new garden, sir."

"Well, I'm damned!" said the puce-coloured gentleman.

★*If Captain Smith had "too much damned zeal" for the leisurely gentlemen of the Admiralty, his enthusiasm and tactical acumen were just the qualities demanded by the King of Sweden. And next month we shall find our resourceful hero with the Swedish Grand Fleet, as naval adviser to King Gustavus in his campaign against Russia.*

* * *

THESE ENGLISH

WHEN you are abroad, you must renounce many of your favourite habits.

As a nicely-brought-up English child, you will have learnt from your elders that good manners require you to be slighting and off-hand.

In England you will naturally not greet an acquaintance when you see him; or, should you do so one morning, you will correct your error by cutting him the next.

Abroad, you need not fear the frost-bite of the English face.

Nevertheless, it is not unfriendliness that makes the English unfriendly, but numbness.

Being numb, they are shy.

YOU would not, therefore, expect the English to fall in love. And they seldom do.

An Englishman regards a woman who is in love with him, with equanimity; in fact, with distaste.

Love is a private disturbance of the peace; and not to be encouraged.

Innocent of lively emotions, the Englishman cherishes Public Opinions.

THUS, there is no other people so ready in private to break every Commandment, who yet are so honest in commerce, reliable in office and brave in battle.

Morality, for them, is good behaviour in public.

An Englishman will fly without a word from a woman who is on the point of killing herself for love of him; then, on the way home, jump to his death to rescue from drowning another woman he has never seen. VILLIERS DAVID, *Advice to My Godchildren*

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WET SATURDAY

"Would you care to see something rather interesting?" asked Mr. Princey

by JOHN COLLIER

IT was July. In the sprawling house they were imprisoned by the swish and the gurgle and all the hundred sounds of rain. They were in the drawing-room, behind four tall and weeping windows, in a lake of damp and faded chintz.

This house, ill-kept and unprepossessing, was necessary to Mr. Princey, who detested his wife, his daughter, and his hulking son. His life was to walk through the village, touching his hat, not smiling. His cold pleasure was to recapture snapshot memories of the infinitely remote summers of his childhood—coming into the orangery and finding his lost wooden horse, the tunnel in the box hedge, and the little square of light at the end of it.

But now all this was threatened—his austere pride of position in the village, his passionate attachment to the house—and all because Millicent, his cloddish daughter Millicent, had done this shocking and incredibly stupid thing. Mr. Princey turned from her in revulsion and spoke to his wife.

"They'd send her to a lunatic asylum," he said. "A criminal lunatic asylum. We should have to move. It would be impossible."

His daughter began to shake again. "I'll kill myself," she said.

"Be quiet," said Mr. Princey. "We have very little time. No time for nonsense. I intend to deal with this." He called to his son, who stood looking out of the window. "George, come here. Listen, how far did you get with your medicine before they threw you out as hopeless?"

"You know as well as I do," said George.

"Do you know enough—did they drive enough into your head for you to be able to guess what a competent doctor could tell about such a wound?"

"Well, it's a—it's a knock or blow."

"If a tile fell from the roof? Or a piece of the coping?"

"Well, guv'nor, you see, it's like this—"

"Is it possible?"

"No."

"Why not?"

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"Oh, because she hit him several times."

"I can't stand it," said Mrs. Princey.

"You have got to stand it, my dear," said her husband. "And keep that hysterical note out of your voice. It might be overheard. We are talking about the weather. If he fell down the well, George, striking his head several times?"

"I really don't know, guv'nor."

"He'd have had to hit the sides several times in thirty or forty feet, and at the correct angles. No, I'm afraid not. We must go over it all again. Millicent."

"No! No!"

"Millicent, we must go over it all again. Perhaps you have forgotten something. One tiny irrelevant detail may save or ruin us. Particularly you, Millicent. You don't *want* to be put in an asylum, do you? Or be hanged? They might hang you, Millicent. You must stop that shaking. You must keep your voice quiet. We are talking of the weather. Now."

"I can't. I . . . I . . ."

"Be quiet, child. Be quiet." He put his long, cold face very near to his daughter's. He found himself horribly revolted by her. Her features were thick, her jaw heavy, her whole figure repellently powerful. "Answer me," he said: "You were in the stable?"

"Yes."

"One moment, though. Who knew you were in love with this wretched curate?"

"No one. I've never said a—"

"Don't worry," said George. "The whole damned village knows. They've been sniggering about it in The Plough for three years past."

"Likely enough," said Mr. Princey. "Likely enough. What filth!" He made as if to wipe something off the backs of his hands. "Well, now, we continue. You were in the stable?"

"Yes."

"You were putting the croquet set into its box?"

"Yes."

"You heard someone crossing the yard?"

"Yes."

"It was Wethers?"

"Yes."

"So you called him?"

"Yes."

"Loudly? Did you call him loudly? Could anyone have heard?"

"No, Father. I'm sure not. I didn't call him. He saw me as I went to the door. He just waved his hand and came over."

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"How *can* I find out from you whether there was anyone about? Whether he *could* have been seen?"

"I'm sure not, Father. I'm quite sure."

"So you both went into the stable?"

"Yes. It was raining hard."

"What did he say?"

"He said 'Hullo, Milly.' And to excuse him coming in the back way, but he'd set out to walk over to Lyston."

"Yes."

"And he said, passing the park, he'd seen the house and suddenly thought of me, and he thought he'd just look in for a minute, just to tell me something. He said he was so happy, he wanted me to share it. He'd heard from the Bishop he was to have the vicarage. And it wasn't only that. It meant he could marry. And he began to stutter. And I thought he meant me."

"Don't tell me what you thought. Exactly what he said. Nothing else."

"Well . . . Oh dear!"

"Don't cry. It is a luxury you cannot afford. Tell me."

"He said no. He said it wasn't me. It's Ella Brangwyn-Davies. And he was sorry. And all that. Then he went to go."

"And then?"

"I went mad. He turned his back. I had the winning post of the croquet set in my hand—"

"Did you shout or scream? I mean, as you hit him?"

"No. I'm sure I didn't."

"Did he? Come on. Tell me."

"No, Father."

"And then?"

"I threw it down. I came straight into the house. That's all. I wish I were dead!"

"And you met none of the servants. No one will go into the stable. You see, George, he probably told people he was going to Lyston. Certainly no one knows he came here. He might have been attacked in the woods. We must consider every detail . . . A curate, with his head battered in—"

"Don't, Father!" cried Millicent.

"Do you want to be hanged? A curate, with his head battered in, found in the woods. Who'd want to kill Wethers?"

There was a tap on the door, which opened immediately. It was little Captain Smolet, who never stood on ceremony. "Who'd kill Wethers?" said he. "I would, with pleasure. How d'you do, Mrs. Princey. I walked right in."

"He heard you, Father," moaned Millicent.

"My dear, we can all have our little joke," said her father.

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"Don't pretend to be shocked. A little theoretical curate-killing, Smolet. In these days we talk nothing but thrillers."

"Parsonicide," said Captain Smolet. "Justifiable parsonicide. Have you heard about Ella Brangwyn-Davies? I shall be laughed at."

"Why?" said Mr. Princey. "Why should you be laughed at?"

"Had a shot in that direction myself," said Smolet, with careful sang-froid. "She half said yes, too. Hadn't you heard? She told most people. Now it'll look as if I got turned down for a white rat in a dog collar."

"Too bad!" said Mr. Princey.

"Fortune of war," said the little captain.

"Sit down," said Mr. Princey. "Mother, Millicent, console Captain Smolet with your best light conversation. George and I have something to look to. We shall be back in a minute or two, Smolet. Come, George."

It was actually five minutes before Mr. Princey and his son returned.

"Excuse me, my dear," said Mr. Princey to his wife. "Smolet, would you care to see something rather interesting? Come out to the stables for a moment."

They went into the stable yard. The buildings were now unused except as odd sheds. No one ever went there. Captain Smolet entered, George followed him, Mr. Princey came last. As he closed the door he took up a gun which stood behind it. "Smolet," said he, "we have come out to shoot a rat which George heard squeaking under that tub. Now, you must listen to me very carefully or you will be shot by accident. I mean that."

Smolet looked at him. "Very well," said he. "Go on."

"A very tragic happening has taken place this afternoon," said Mr. Princey. "It will be even more tragic unless it is smoothed over."

"Oh?" said Smolet.

"You heard me ask," said Mr. Princey, "who would kill Wethers. You heard Millicent make a comment, an unguarded comment."

"Well?" said Smolet. "What of it?"

"Very little," said Mr. Princey. "Unless you heard that Wethers had met a violent end this very afternoon. And that, my dear Smolet, is what you are going to hear."

"Have you killed him?" cried Smolet.

"Millicent has," said Mr. Princey.

"Hell!" said Smolet.

"It *is* hell," said Mr. Princey. "You would have remembered —and guessed."

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"Maybe," said Smolet. "Yes. I suppose I should."

"Therefore," said Mr. Princey, "you constitute a problem."

"Why did she kill him?" said Smolet.

"It is one of these disgusting things," said Mr. Princey. "Pitiable, too. She deluded herself that he was in love with her."

"Oh, of course," said Smolet.

"And he told her about the Brangwyn-Davies girl."

"I see," said Smolet.

"I have no wish," said Mr. Princey, "that she should be proved either a lunatic or a murderess. I could hardly live here after that."

"I suppose not," said Smolet.

"On the other hand," said Mr. Princey, "*you* know about it."

"Yes," said Smolet. "I am wondering if I could keep my mouth shut. If I promised you—"

"I am wondering if I could believe you," said Mr. Princey.

"If I promised," said Smolet.

"If things went smoothly," said Mr. Princey. "But not if there was any sort of suspicion, any questioning. You would be afraid of being an accessory."

"I don't know," said Smolet.

"I do," said Mr. Princey. "What are we going to do?"

"I can't see anything else," said Smolet. "You'd never be fool enough to do me in. You can't get rid of two corpses."

"I regard it," said Mr. Princey, "as a better risk than the other. It could be an accident. Or you and Wethers could both disappear. There are possibilities in that."

"Listen," said Smolet. "You can't—"

"Listen," said Mr. Princey. "There may be a way out. There *is* a way out, Smolet. You gave me the idea yourself."

"Did I?" said Smolet. "What?"

"You said you would kill Wethers," said Mr. Princey. "You have a motive."

"I was joking," said Smolet.

"You are always joking," said Mr. Princey. "People think there must be something behind it. Listen, Smolet, I can't trust you, you must trust me. Or I will kill you now, in the next minute. I mean that. You can choose between dying and living."

"Go on," said Smolet.

"There is a sewer here," said Mr. Princey, speaking fast and forcefully. "That is where I am going to put Wethers. No outsider knows he has come up here this afternoon. No one will ever look there for him unless you tell them. You must give me evidence that you have murdered Wethers."

"Why?" said Smolet.

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"So that I shall be dead sure that you will never open your lips on the matter," said Mr. Princey.

"What evidence?" said Smolet.

"George," said Mr. Princey, "hit him in the face, hard."

"Good God!" said Smolet.

"Again," said Mr. Princey. "Don't bruise your knuckles."

"Oh!" said Smolet.

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Princey. "There must be traces of a struggle between you and Wethers. Then it will not be altogether safe for you to go to the police."

"Why won't you take my word?" said Smolet.

"I will when we've finished," said Mr. Princey. "George, get that croquet post. Take your handkerchief to it. As I told you. Smolet, you'll just grasp the end of this croquet post. I shall shoot you if you don't."

"Oh, hell," said Smolet. "All right."

"Pull two hairs out of his head, George," said Mr. Princey, "and remember what I told you to do with them. Now, Smolet, you take that bar and raise the big flagstone with the ring in it. Wethers is in the next stall. You've got to drag him through and dump him in."

"I won't touch him," said Smolet.

"Stand back, George," said Mr. Princey, raising his gun.

"Wait a minute," cried Smolet. "Wait a minute." He did as he was told.

Mr. Princey wiped his brow. "Look here," said he. "Everything is perfectly safe. Remember, no one knows that Wethers came here. Everyone thinks he walked over to Lyston. That's five miles of country to search. They'll never look in our sewer. Do you see how safe it is?"

"I suppose it is," said Smolet.

"Now come into the house," said Mr. Princey. "We shall never get that rat."

They went into the house. The maid was bringing tea into the drawing-room. "See, my dear," said Mr. Princey to his wife, "we went to the stable to shoot a rat and we found Captain Smolet. Don't be offended, my dear fellow."

"You must have walked up the back drive," said Mrs. Princey.

"Yes. Yes. That was it," said Smolet in some confusion.

"You've cut your lip," said George, handing him a cup of tea.

"I . . . I just knocked it."

"Shall I tell Bridget to bring some iodine?" said Mrs. Princey. The maid looked up, waiting.

"Don't trouble, please," said Smolet. "It's nothing."

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"Very well, Bridget," said Mrs. Princey. "That's all."

"Smolet is very kind," said Mr. Princey. "He knows all our trouble. We can rely on him. We have his word."

"Oh, have we, Captain Smolet?" cried Mrs. Princey. "You *are* good."

"Don't worry, old fellow," Mr. Princey said. "They'll never find anything."

Pretty soon Smolet took his leave. Mrs. Princey pressed his hand very hard. Tears came into her eyes. All three of them watched him go down the drive. Then Mr. Princey spoke very earnestly to his wife for a few minutes and the two of them went upstairs and spoke still more earnestly to Millicent. Soon after, the rain having ceased, Mr. Princey took a stroll round the stable yard.

He came back and went to the telephone. "Put me through to Lyston police station," said he. "Quickly . . . Hullo, is that the police-station?—This is Mr. Princey, of Abbott's Laxton.—I'm afraid something rather terrible has happened up here. Can you send someone at once?"

* * *

ENNUI

A bore is one who stuffs you with his thick and suffocating discourse, who rams his suety personality, like a dumpling, down your throat.

ALDOUS HUXLEY

A scientist had been boring Mrs. Patrick Campbell by a long account of the habits of ants. "They have their own army, you know, and their own police force."

"No navy, I suppose?" she inquired.

Author Unknown

People always get tired of one another. I grow tired of myself whenever I am left alone for ten minutes, and I am certain that I am fonder of myself than anyone can be of another person. GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Remark about a bore: "Why, people used to get up parties just *not* to have him!" *Author Unknown*

One can be bored until boredom becomes a mystical experience. LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH

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MAN PROPOSES

I am two fooles, I know
For loving, and for saying so . . .

JOHN DONNE

" I love you, Roberta—"

" Miss March," she interrupted.

" And I want you to tell me if you love me in return."

Miss March rose from the rock where she had been sitting, and her companion rose with her. After a moment's silence, during which he watched her with intense eagerness, she said : " Mr. Croft, I am going to give you your choice. Would you prefer being refused under a cherry-tree, or under a sycamore ? "

There was a little smile on her lips as she said this . . .

" I decline being refused under any tree," he said with vehemence.

" I prefer the cherry-tree," said she ; " there is a very pretty one over there on the ridge of this hill, and its leaves are nearly all gone, which would make it quite appropriate."

FRANK R. STOCKTON, *The Late Mrs. Null*

Cri de Coeur

Give me a willing nymph ! 'tis all I care . . .

ALEXANDER POPE

Cathexis

" You mean you love me ? " said a male voice, in a lofty pitch.

" Oh, must you use these loose expressions ? We're scientists, aren't we ? Can't we talk in our own language ? "

" Very well," said the Doctor sulkily.

" It's just that I felt we had to assemble and clarify our reactions . . . Sometimes I feel you have a trend to the schizophrenic . . ."

" Yes ? " he said. " But haven't we all ? "

" Oh, I don't mean the normal rational schizophrenic. That's to be expected, of course, in any male of the higher brain-groups. One moment he's on the Bench, the next he's in the bar . . . What worries me about *you*," the voice continued mercilessly, " is that you seem to me to have a split *libido*—a duplicated id . . .

" That, I know is only a clinical estimate. But the symptomatic factors are fairly numerous and notable. Only two weeks ago, I should have said you needed me. Our egos were a perfect blend. Our ids made rather a cosy pattern. On the psychocerebral level, of course, you needed me, you always will : and I should have said—

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Oh, let's face it! We're scientists—there was a *psychosomatic* urge—you needed my *body*. That, I know, can only be proved by controlled experiment: but that was my provisional diagnosis . . .

"You can't deny it, in the last two or three days, I'm sure—there's been a significant switch. Well, I won't say a switch: but the attitude's *ambivalent*. I had almost to use physical force to get you out here . . .

"I've wondered whether perhaps there's been some new psychotic development in my own system. I've been examining myself. I can find no trace of endocrine anomaly. The psychosexual reflexes seem to be operating normally—at all events, Heriot, in propinquity with you. Of course, our work here is bound to contain some factors of sublimation: but I compensate for that by nightly brooding exercises—"

"What do you brood about?" said the Doctor.

"You, Heriot," said the lady simply.

A. P. HERBERT, *Number–Nine*

Impasse

What shall I do with So-and-So?
She won't say Yes and she won't say No.
She tiptoes around the cunningest traps
With a smile and a murmur of Perhaps.
At nine I'm Darling, at ten I'm You—
Tell me, what is a man to do
When the lady his life is based upon
Likes to be wooed but won't be won?

OGDEN NASH

Coup de Grâce

"You are treating me unfairly!" he cried.

"You were going to give me a great deal, I suppose, — looking at it in your way," she went on, "but if I *wasn't* exactly what you wanted, I had something to give, too. I'm young enough to have a good many years to live; and I should have to live them with you, if I married you. That's something, you know."

He rose from his seat pale with wrath and wounded feeling . . .

"Then," he said, "I need say no more. I see that I have—humiliated myself in vain; and it is rather bitter, I must confess."

"It wasn't my fault," she remarked.

He stepped back with a haughty wave of the hand . . .

"There's another reason why it should be 'No,'" she said. "I suppose I may as well tell you. I'm engaged to somebody else."

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT, *A Fair Barbarian*

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How It All Begins

For glances beget ogles, ogles sighs,
Sighs wishes, wishes words, and words a letter . . .
And then, God knows what mischief may arise . . .

LORD BYRON, *Beppo*

In Brief

The plain English of the politest address of a gentleman to a lady, is, I am now, dear madam, the humblest of your servants: Be so good as to allow me to be your Lord and Master.

SAMUEL RICHARDSON, 1689–1761, *Pamela*

Good Intentions

. . . Do not choose a maid in haste ;
She might not do, if picked at random ;
What though I have a dainty taste?
De gustibus non disputandum.—
Lest she deceive my expectations,
I make the following stipulations.

Firstly, I make a sweeping clearance
Of all who are blue-eyed and flaxen,
Because in personal appearance
Myself I typify the Saxon ;
And therefore I have often felt
I would prefer to wed a Celt . . .

Next if serene, though China fall,
And fond of exercise and air,
She need not be divinely tall,
She need not be divinely fair ;
Nor mopy, languishing, or fragile,
But healthy, well set-up, and agile.

I've written to her old address—
A charming village, served by carrier—
I've had her confidential YES ;
And—mark—although I'm going to marry her
She's not as stipulated. *Still,*
I've said I would, and now I will.

FRANK SIDGWICK

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BUSH PILOT

"Do you hate all women?" Sally said. "Or just me?"

by DAVID WALKER

"THANKS for the flight, Jim. Can we help?"

"No," he said. "I only have to make her fast. Be seeing you."

They went away, which was good. He fixed the second line from pontoon to raft, checked that all switches were off, took out his bed-roll, shut the cockpit door, and walked up the bank. It was raining. His head hummed with too much flying. He did not feel good, but it was probably only the tiredness. He was going to bed down at Rigg's to sleep for hours and hours and hours if he could, which was doubtful. Two breed girls in tartan skirts were standing in the door of a shack. He did not say hello to them. It was a dusty place in dry weather, a mud bath in rain, damned depressing either way; you could take your pick.

McIntosh, the Mountie, met him along the track. "You're just the man I want to see, Jim," he said. "Heard you'd arrived. Can you come inside a minute?" He was out of breath. He did not wait for an answer, but led the way down the board-walk to the R.C.M.P. office.

"What is it?" said Jim from behind him. Mac was all right. "If you want me to take you some place, you can think again. Been flying fifteen hours out of the last twenty, which is too much." He dropped his bed-roll and took the only chair. "Well, what is it?" Nobody ever wanted to see him in a hurry unless there was a catch somewhere.

"There's a plane missing," Serjeant McIntosh said. He was a sandy-headed Scotsman with a sandy face, short of words like most of the ones who had been a long time in the North. "Here's what happened. This woman arrived this morning in her own plane. She'd been taking it easy all the way down river, a writer seeing the country . . ."

Jim groaned.

"I know. Well, at Good Hope somebody told her about the band of Huskies we found starving halfway to Coppermine—the inspector's up there now as a matter of fact—and she came on

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here quick. She got in at ten, had breakfast, gassed up and came to ask me where the Eskimos were exactly. I told her. It's a hundred and forty miles beyond Tuk on the coast. I also told her the Met. report was bad—cold front from the north, fog and wind off the ice. I told her she'd never get there today . . ."

"What kind of a plane?"

"A Carver Pup."

"Dot and carry one," said Jim with disgust. "She'd never get there and back any time, not enough range, quite apart from . . ."

"She could take on gas at Tuk, though, and make it. I told her she was crazy to fly in the weather that was coming, pretty well forbade her to go. So she whipped out letters of introduction from Ottawa—every facility, you know the stuff, a free-lance journalist from the States with all the strings pulled tight."

"Why didn't you stop her? Why didn't you arrest the damn woman?"

"I tried to stop her. Asked for her licence and log-book. That made her madder than hell. She said it was a free country and she had a duty to find out about these suffering people and if I hindered her she'd make my name and the name of the Force stink throughout America. Meant it too. You ever try and compete with one of these press women?"

"I hate their guts. Go on."

"She took off at noon, making for Tuk-tuk. Well, she never got there. That's nothing much in itself because the weather was closing, and she might have come down this side of the Cariboo mountains. No real alarm. But an hour ago Bob Paluktong, an Eskimo, arrived by canoe. He has a big kicker—makes fifteen miles an hour—said he was in his trapping area when he heard a plane coming with a bad engine . . ."

"How did he know it was bad?"

"Well, enough. He's a mechanic like all the Huskies. I'll get him." Mac went to the door and shouted in Eskimo.

Jim closed his eyes, but the lights in his head swung at him. He opened them again. Mac interpreted for the Eskimo, who spoke with assurance, copied the noise of the engine—it missed and picked up and missed, sounded like a choked feed-pipe. He had seen the small blue plane, flying not far above the trees. He knew the direction of flight. No, the noise had died away slowly. He found his own position on the map. Bob Paluktong was a reliable witness.

"You'd know better than me, Jim, but I don't imagine she would get over the Cariboo with a faulty engine."

"No, she wouldn't, not in this weather. What about radio?"

"She said she had one. In fact I saw it in the plane. But

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she never checked in or out with Traffic Control. Out of order, I guess."

"So where do I come in?" He knew where he came in.

"The C.C.F. Norseman isn't due back for two days. So I asked Matt's outfit. They've got one on Lake Athabaska, one in Edmonton for overhaul, another in the south. Nothing doing. I checked with the Squadron at the Wells, but they're weatherbound. I checked on the Yukon side. No planes. You're the only available aircraft within six hundred miles. But I know you're tired, Jim. If you need sleep, you'll have to have it."

"Of course I need sleep. What's the weather?"

"Ceiling three hundred feet now, closing tonight to a hundred or less, perhaps clearing for an hour or two during the night, then bad again. You know what it is. We may have worse than this for a week."

"I'll go," he said sourly. "I'll try once for this damned blankety-blank-amateur-flying-journalist-woman. Send someone down to help me fuel. Bring coffee to the plane."

"Nothing to eat?"

"Plain bread and jam."

"No eggs?"

"I told you."

"Do you want me to come with you, Jim?"

"No." But he did not mean to be surly to him. "Thanks, Mac, I need all the lift I can."

He took his bed-roll and went out. It was raining a steady drizzle. The Mackenzie river was high and dirty with flood. The Eskimo came to help him. Jim lay along the wet metal to fill both wing tanks. First the pump would not work; then he had to clean the gas filter. But they got her fuelled. He made Paluktong show him the place and direction of flight on his own flying map. He was ready. His head hammered; he was beginning to think it couldn't just be lack of sleep.

Here was Mac, someone else beside him. It was Rankin, the Magistrate, straight from Ottawa, which was where he should have stayed.

"This is good of you, Mr. Marshall," he said. Mac muttered something to him, but he went on: "Very good of you to search in such bad weather."

"Look," said Jim. "Next time one of these fools wants to fly off in a crazy direction, just stop him, will you? Stop him or her. Don't ask me to risk my neck on mercy flights. I'm a bush-pilot, not a glamour boy. I stay alive by knowing when and where to fly, and when not. Now is when not. Sign the sheet, will you?"

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Rankin signed the charter sheet. There was no harm in him. He belonged to a different life. "We had to notify Ottawa as soon as the plane was overdue," he said. "Now wires are pouring in from the American Press. It's only to be expected with such a famous woman journalist . . ."

"If she's dead, she'll be even more famous for a couple of days until she's forgotten."

"Really, Mr. Marshall!" said Rankin stiffly. "Miss Todd . . ."

"*What's* her name? Todd, did you say?" He undid the two securing lines.

"Yes," said Mac. "Sally Todd. Quite a dish too if you don't mind the type that tears your eyes out. Do you know her?"

Jim climbed in. "I did once," he said. "Hold the starboard float till I tell you, Mac." He set the mixture to rich, switched on and pressed the starter. She took at once. They had already flown six hundred hours together, and she was a great little plane for the job. He gave her a small burst of gun to swing her from the raft, took it very gingerly as you always had to, waved his hand, and now they were out in the stream.

Sally Todd, he thought, taxying upriver, watching oil-pressure, temperature, all the rest, giving half throttle, full throttle for a little, testing for mag-drop. Now warm enough if you were in a don't-give-a-damn mood. He drank off his coffee, closed the thermos, feeling a bit better or a bit less dead, and turned downstream, across wind for the take-off.

It was choppy, no drift-wood to be seen. She bucked about heavy for the first few seconds, dirty spray all over the roaring place, till he pumped the stick and pumped again and a third time and now she was on the step, riding easy, riding faster, touching, skimming, touching, not touching, airborne. He swung left away from the trees as the channel turned, put his flaps up, changed pitch, signed out with Traffic Control. In a matter of seconds he was at the wispy undersurface of the cloud ceiling, just three hundred feet. He throttled back to cruising revs.

It was fifty miles to Paluktong's trapping area, which was the beginning. He held the map on his right knee and checked country against map. His forefinger inched up. He knew the delta better from the air than anyone living. He knew it like the back of his hand until he was lost, and then he could be as lost for a while as Sally Todd or anybody over this maze of lakes, creeks, strips of stunted spruce, and more lakes and more trees, a honeycomb of divided lakes, all the same all different, a land of water with the mud content diminishing as you went farther from the main channels.

But there were degrees of being lost. He would be lost locally

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for a few minutes till he hit some channel of the river. He knew them all. If a novice or almost any stranger got lost, he would or she would, they would change course, and the compass would act up crazy in this latitude with turning error, and they'd never give it a chance to settle. The ceiling would be down to two hundred, mountains to east and west, fog over the Arctic Sea, try back south, hanging on and hanging on, putting off the pancake till too late into the white clouds, and then no way down except the blind way, splintering smack into mosquito paradise. *Damn Sally Todd. Damn Sally Todd from long ago at home in New Brunswick.*

He remembered as he flew through rain over the desolate trees and water. He remembered a very different kind of place, fishing for flounders in the last summer vacation after graduating from high school. A sunny day and warm and the dinghy rocking:

"How many now, Sally?"

"Fifteen, sixteen. I'm not sure. They're too slimy floppy. So you're going to join the R.A.F. Why not the R.C.A.F., Jim?"

"I want to go overseas."

"You want to be a glamorous pilot boy in Poona." Cracks like that, always just a bit too smart wise-alecky clever, but miraculously beautiful—a girl a woman in blue jeans laughing at you.

"I'd rather be a pilot than a newspaperwoman lapping up murders." He was no good at saying things, so that was quite a good remark for him.

"You drop bombs on the innocent natives and I'll write the story." There she was again. He disliked that about dropping bombs, but he could not think of a come-back. "The tide's on the ebb," he said. "We won't catch any more. Let's go back to the wharf."

"Okay."

He started the outboard and headed out round the end of the long knife-edge reef. Sally sat in the bow. The breeze blew her hair about; her waist was slender; her hips were not too wide and were nice to look at from behind unseen. But he was annoyed with her; which perhaps was why he changed his mind and swung over to cross the reef.

"You shouldn't try it, Jim," she said, looking round. "Not an hour after flood. Dad says . . ."

"Never mind what your Dad says. There's ten feet where I'm going."

That shut her up. She looked ahead again. He opened the throttle wide, and the dinghy rode down a little at the stern, and they were going to do it easy. Sally's father might be a weir-

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fisherman, but he didn't know. Why, you had crossed it last week at lower water than this. You knew the deep place.

Sally watched the water. It was smooth. There wasn't much of an ebb running yet. They were nearly over; yes, now. "Look out, Jim!" she shouted.

He had no time to look out. They hit the jagged rock with a thudding crack of wood. The dinghy was old and thin. She filled at once, and for a few seconds after he cut the motor they stood among dead flounders bellies up and living flounders while the water rose. It was Bay of Fundy water. You didn't swim in it. You drowned cold in it. "Come on, Jim," said Sally. "It isn't far." It was a hundred yards as a matter of fact, which was a long long way against the tide while the cold bit deeper and deeper into you till your arms would hardly work, and you wondered how you could ever have been warm, and you panicked. Then you had no strength except to shout: "Help!" and gulp salt water.

She came for you. "Lie on your back!"

You didn't. You clutched at her, but she smacked you on the bridge of the nose. So you lay on your back in the calm sea under the sun in the cold, numb now, and Sally Todd pulled you after her for ever. "Shallow," she said or gasped. It was. You blundered to the dry warm rocks where you were sick. Wonderful brave Sally Todd; but she said after a while: "If daring little pilot boys have to show off, they shouldn't get panicky."

Which you might have forgotten because who can say that he never has panicked, and what drowning man does not panic? You might have forgotten because the time did come when you ceased to be on guard about your own courage, when you made little of your medals and your reputation, knowing they were yours right and proper. But you had not forgotten your grudge against Sally Todd, the beautiful, the war-correspondent, the sob-sister, the typical woman able to rebuke only by insult. A grudge for this and for another reason.

He thought of it as he and the plane flew over drab water and drab trees to Bob Paluktong's trapping area. He hit the place right on the nose, a U curve of the channel; an arm from the bottom, a creek as straight and even as a canal across the arm, all making a wine glass, a claret glass. He circled that once to get on his first course, which was to the right of the line the Eskimo had given. Ceiling was down to two hundred, and what could you hope to see from that height at a hundred miles an hour late in the evening when the light was weak and it was raining? He drew a pencil free-hand up the map; then followed that course,

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north-east more or less, parallel to the way she had been seen to go.

But he saw nothing. Eyes were the worst; they were inelastic, not focusing below, to the side, the other side, ahead, far ahead to the dim line of the horizon; eyes were no damned good. No blue plane turned belly up, wings off, burnt out; but don't think of that. Here were the Cariboo hills at last and the main east channel, no plane here, no plane on the hillside which was the beginning of the Barren Lands, hills cut off at two hundred by cloud but solid above, plenty solid.

A steep turn back on to south-west for the second slice. It was a chance in a million, no, a chance in a hundred that she would not have wandered. What was this craze for the Story, capital S, that made them so mad determined?

He did a thing he had hardly ever done before. He reached back for his whisky bottle in the dunnage bag, eyes searching all the time, got the cap off, took a long swig, closed it again, felt strength a little better against the cold and lassitude and cramped legs.

The ceiling was a hundred and fifty more or less, by the time he had reached the inverted wine glass, turned back right on to north-east for the third slice, strip or chukker as they used to call it in India—in Poona, Sally said. Carburetter heat. He switched that on, heard the change of tune, the good healthy roar; enough now, off again. On the third run he did not reach the Cariboo because cloud was down to a hundred, to less, to zero, a blank grey wall in front of him. He obeyed the one rule he never broke: he turned back before cloud.

She was port-wing heavy. He switched on to the other tank again. She coughed, ran sweetly. One more try, then home, no gas—home if you didn't have to let down sooner because of this cold front from the Ocean piling up southwards.

He knew now by the headache, the feeling of God-I'd-like-to-die, the cold at the base of his neck, that it was coming. *If you can go six months without an attack*, the specialist said, *then you'll be cured of malaria. But this Benign Tertian is obstinate.* Yes, obstinate. Five months gone and you thought you were cured. You had two hours almost exactly from this stage before it hit you.

Then he saw the colour blue, pale blue, a woman's colour for a plane, over on the right. She was a smash-up, but blue meant not burned-out. He was at less than a hundred; he was being forced down, down on to the thirty-foot trees, spiky and jagged, the most northerly trees in America and the ugliest.

"Aklavik Army," he called. "Aklavik Army. Able monkey sugar to Aklavik Army. How do you read me? Over." Again and again but no answer over the asterisked ether. "Able monkey

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sugar to Aklavik Army. Plane located. Plane located at . . . " Damn and blast all radios to hell.

He could get in. It was a lake, deep enough, long enough to get in, definitely not long enough to get out. But was that an arm from the top corner at an angle ? Yes. So okay if you could do right-angle turn take-offs which were by way of being a refinement. Okay, okay. By this time he had seen that the plane was a write-off, slam smack into the bank below the trees—on its nose—but not a dead-man write-off. Somebody in khaki was waving. Sally Todd was waving in her pants in her trousers. She would be.

He put down his flaps and did a thing he was famous for. People could be famous for different things. He was moderately famous for his sideslip landings. Left stick, right rudder, crab fashion, airspeed not as in the book, making old pilots sweat, the plane sighing whistling down like an elevator right down skipping the trees, almost, nearly, now straighten at the very last second, now flop, splash. Artistic, not bad with a go of fever in the offing. He had thirty yards to spare. He nosed her up to the bank beside the other plane, cut switches, stepped down on to the pontoon and threw his half-inch line to Sally Todd.

" Pull her up to the bank," he said. " Tie to a tree." His voice boomed in his head. He could not hear the mosquitoes. There were a hundred or a thousand on his face and head already. The air was quite still. She clambered up the bank, tied the knot. She wasn't hurt except that her face was bleeding ; but that might be from bites.

" Come aboard," he said, getting back into the cabin, into the right-hand seat. She came in, shut the door, sat in his place.

" Thanks a lot," she said, not knowing him from Adam. But she had not changed much, even with a bitten bloody face ; and the shape was better than ever under man's clothes, not that you were in a mood to care about such things whether they belonged to a reasonable woman or to Sally Todd who had a lined and lovely face at thirty-three, and a cold sob-sister's mind.

She would not know him for several reasons. First a grey and black stubble four days old. Second, his eyes would be bloodshot, sunk into his head with malaria. Third he wasn't a pretty-looking boy any more, he was a rough rude character and not particularly proud of it.

" Fancy seeing you here, Sally," he said. He took his little gun and sprayed the cabin with insecticide.

She jumped and turned. How long would it take her ? It took her a short time. " Jim ! " she said. " Jim Marshall." She put her hand out, then took it back. For once in a way she was knocked over, floored, off balance, on her beam ends. " Jim ! "

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No lovely re-unions, thank you. He jerked his thumb at the window. "Take a look at that." Cloud was down into the tree-tops, was coming lower, cloud into mist. The mosquitoes were also a cloud, baffled. "I got in with a minute to spare. Now you have company."

"That was the most amazing landing I've ever seen."

"Thanks. Have you seen many?"

"Some."

"How many hours have you flown?"

"A hundred and twenty. I suppose you're up in the thousands, Jim."

"Six thousand five hundred more or less," he said. "I *have* seen a few landings, and made some I didn't want to make."

"*Touchée*," she said, quite humble. "I'm sorry, Jim."

"What happened?" His teeth were chattering, but very faintly. He propped his jaw with a finger. That stopped them.

"I was half an hour out when the engine started to miss. It went in spurts, but I could keep height. I was just going to turn back when it came all right again. I had five hundred feet, and those hills are less than that and they said Tuk-tuk would be clear for an hour or two, so I went on . . . I suppose I was wrong."

"You were," he said, realizing what he had not realized—that she was shaken. "Go on."

"Then suddenly it missed very badly and I lost height. I was down to two hundred when I had to turn because of the hills. I turned left and came back and I must have been at about a hundred when I decided to land at the first chance, which was here. I did try to sideslip, but not steep enough, then into the bank going quite fast." She shuddered. "I wasn't even bruised."

"We'll have a drink," he said, reaching for the bottle. "Or do you want coffee?"

"Both," she said. She had half and half in the thermos cup. He took his from the bottle; it did not warm him much. He was in the cantankerous sink of dejection which preceded his fever; otherwise he might have been kind to her now alone in the middle of nowhere.

"They warned you not to fly."

"Yes," she admitted. "That serjeant man said it would get worse later on. But I had plenty of time. Engine trouble can happen to anyone." She was a shade less humble. The original Sally Todd was peeping out.

"Sure it can happen to anyone. *Did you filter that load of gas?*"

She hesitated. "Not quite all of it. The filter thing was so slow."

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"And you were in a hurry. Number one. Then when Mac tried to stop you, you threatened to smear him. You said you would make the name of the R.C.M.P. stink. Correct?"

"I didn't really mean it. I had to get going."

"So you said that to Mac McIntosh who's been twenty years in the North. Not here, but in the real North—twenty years looking after the Eskimo."

"Well?" she said, staring at him. "I'm sorry I said it. But all the way down river I've been hearing the same thing about the ruin of the natives. Then at Fort Good Hope they told me this pitiful story of a band of Eskimos starving on the coast. I had to go after it. If I'd known there was a charter-plane around, I'd have hired you to take me."

"No, you wouldn't," said Jim. The shivers ran through his back and down his legs. He hunched himself up. "You don't give a damn for the unfortunate Eskimos. All you care about is a scoop for Sally Todd. First with a story from another outlandish place. First with a cheap bit of horror for the public. Doing your sacred duty, and if you can throw in a little cannibalism, so much the better."

"You're horrible," she said. "You're a horrible embittered man."

"Maybe I'm that. I'm a bush pilot; it's my business, and I don't want to kill myself hunting for people like you. This may be your idea of a cheap sensation, but it's not mine. All I want is to be an old pilot."

"That's the damnedest ancient chestnut. Surely you can think of a more original remark." She was angry.

"What I can think of is another thing." He was very very cold now, and it would begin soon, but he would say this, which had been in his mind all along. "I had a pilot in my squadron in Burma. His name was Fincastle. Afterwards he flew for an oil company in Venezuela."

She gave a start, but said nothing.

"I liked Tom Fincastle. He was my wing man. You were down there last year. I read the piece you wrote when you broke the news to his wife. I saw the picture you took of her just after. I read Sally Todd's moving tale of a woman's grief. It won you a prize, didn't it, that story of a pilot's widow alone at the edge of the jungle? It helped the great Todd reputation."

"And what about it?" she cried in the small closed cabin. "Isn't that life and death?"

"It's your version of it. You suck at other people's misery."

"You're mad," she said. "You must be." She took a compact from a shirt pocket and repaired her face. It was a face of great

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character and beauty which he disliked. He managed to get the neck of the bottle between his teeth, but he spilled a good deal.

They sat in silence. He could hear the mosquitoes now. He could hear the hum and the patter of myriads of feet on plexiglass and on aluminium. He heard that distinctly. It was midnight. The sun would be shining due north, but here under the overcast it was dark like a thunderstorm. The mist was lifting into cloud, perhaps a hundred feet already. The shakes took him in earnest. He could not keep his teeth or his hands or his knees still. She had been watching him out of the corner of her eye for some time.

"You're sick, Jim," she said. "What is it? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I'm getting a go of malaria."

"Have you any quinine or whatever those things are?"

"No good," he said. "No good once it starts."

She undid his bed-roll and put it over him. "What are we going to do? It's started to lift."

"We could go in half an hour, but I don't think I could fly. Damn silly. Just takes a grip of you. Met. says the weather's gonna close again later."

She leaned over to him. "What happens with your malaria, Jim?"

"Get colder and colder for three hours about. Then get hotter and hotter. Weak after."

"How much fever?"

"Hundred and five or so. Where are you going?"

"To get my camera and my bag."

She shut the door. Camera! Camera and typewriter, two Bibles. But no, only one Bible. Camera shutters clicking, bursting, giant cameras, small cameras. Here she was back.

"We'll have to go now, Jim."

"Can't go now." He opened his eyes. "Can't fly. Sorry. But there it is."

"If we don't go now," she said, "we may not go at all. Hospital, Jim. I can fly back and land. That part's easy. But do you think you could take off?"

He made an effort to pull himself together, to pull himself out of the pit of coldness which was much worse than the Bay of Fundy. "I'd know as soon as I started trying." It was a crazy idea, but everything was crazy, so nothing more crazy.

"Where's the dual-control stick?"

"Behind."

She fumbled about. Then he felt her fix it between his knees. "Come on now, Jim. Tell me the instruments . . . How do I

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work the flaps? What speed do I glide with full flap? . . ." Just like an old pilot. Just like a journalist pilot knowing the patter.

She climbed out again and came back with the rope. He forced himself to sit up, pushed the bed-roll out of the way. Mad mad woman you couldn't argue with. Going to kill you both. It didn't matter. Death would be dead cold, negative, not this kind of cold.

"Do up your belt," she said. He fumbled and did it.

They were drifting back in a riffle of north wind. She pressed the starter button. They turned and taxied along the small lake. Sally swung her around a bit, getting practice.

"Much heavier," she muttered.

She turned at the end. "I love flying," she said when the engine was pobbling quietly. "Famous last words. Do you?"

"Love it. No. It's in my guts." He tried to focus his eyes on the far shore where her plane was piled up, tried to gauge the place they would have to start the turn during take-off. What a damn silly question.

"Tell me how we do this and I'll help as much as I can."

He tried to explain what neither you nor anyone else could explain.

"Okay," she said. "Let's go, shall we?" Nonchalant. You might admire that if you didn't know about her.

They went. He held the stick in both hands; it was shaking and so were his feet on the rudder pedals and the whole small roaring world was shaking and he was slow, reactions slow, eyes slow, not corrected, yes corrected. Heave it as rough as you could when you were weak, heave again, up she comes, upsadaisy on the step, instinct after six thousand hours, but old old old man's doddery instinct, no good. Spray falling back. Noise different. True and straight for Sally's blue Pup, blue wreck of a blue pup.

Where was that tree, that marker, yes, left rudder, skidding duck fashion, high velocity crab fashion, palsied. How small and how great is man is woman, sick man, *if daring little pilot boys have to show off*, a bit of stick, too late, going to pile in sideways to water bank muskeg trees, mother earth with the famous Todd, Canadian girl made good in the U.S.A., but round the corner by a damn miracle.

Ague, AYGUE couldn't spell it. Free of water, bounce, quite free and trees close ahead, awful close, awful hard, growing so slow in the wicked North Country, wonderful North Country, one tree such a queer shape with a ball on top. Sally pulling back on stick, fatal, "NO! Keep her down!" Gaining speed, airspeed

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too late, hopeless, have to try, " NOW ! " stick back in stomach, done it, skin of your teeth, hairsbreadth, shove it away.

" You've got 'er, Sally."

He tried to reach for his bed-roll, but he could not. He sank deep.

Mac came in. He was somebody you liked to see. Mac was Mac whatever the weather, which was more than you could say for yourself. At the moment Mac was himself except a little larger than life. " How d'you feel, Jim ? "

" I feel fine," he said. " Scrubbed, cleaned-out, put through the wringer, purged of my sins. That's how I feel." Which was true. His voice was small, not his own voice. It was always the same afterwards.

" You gave us quite a scare," Mac said. " We're not used to malaria in these parts. I thought you were a goner."

—" It looks worse than it is.—How was the landing ? "

" On the heavy side, but no damage done. She buzzed the place a couple of times first. So we went down to the river. Even Rankin arrived in his pyjamas. It was quite a reception committee. I take back what I said about that girl although she did order us around like a bunch of pickpockets. What a woman ! "

" You're welcome to her. Has guts, though, I must admit ; always did have."

Mac smiled. " You used to know her well once upon a time," he said. " Or did you ? "

" Yes," said Jim. He yawned in his comfortable valley of weakness. Yes, once upon a time long ago when you were seventeen and she was seventeen when all the world was hurrying to meet you when you were not disillusioned when life was simple and vivid to grasp for.

" Be seeing you," Mac said. Jim went to sleep.

She was looking down at him when he woke. It was a good dreamless sleep to come out of, from sleep to wide-awake, seeing her in the untidy shirt and windbreaker and slacks but with a red silk scarf and lips of exactly the same shade, artifice, just a reminder.

" Hello," she said. " I'd hardly know you after that shave. Feeling better ? "

" Yes. Thanks for the second rescue by Sally Todd."

" What ? " Then she laughed. " Oh, you mean that time flounder-fishing. Jim, you're like an elephant, remembering things and bearing grudges."

" Did you write a little story ? "

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"Yes," she said. "I just radioed it. Are you surprised I wrote a little story?"

"I'm flabbergasted." He was tired and did not bear any grudges. Bad mood, bad grudges. "Was it the usual stuff?"

"No. It was about a very ornery unusual character. I just came to say goodbye, Jim."

"You're not going there now? Not in this weather. What plane . . . ?"

"I'm going by whaling schooner. I hired one. Two days there and two days back. They say the ice is out now."

"I guess it's a sort of disease with you people."

"I guess it is. Like flying is with you people. There's just one other thing, Jim."

"Yes?"

"They say you'll have to stay in hospital nearly a week. Could you fly me around when I get back? I have to see Great Bear Lake. Then I want to go to those falls on the Nahanni."

"But we can't afford to keep a plane tied up here that long. My Boss couldn't do it in the busy season. He'll send somebody."

"He *has* agreed," she said. "I've chartered you."

"Of all the damned impertinence . . ." He was annoyed, but too tired to do much about that or her or anything.

"Be nice, Jim. Be nice like you used to be. It wouldn't be so dull, would it, us flying together?"

"Dull!"

She sat down on the bed. "Do you hate all women? Or just me?"

"I like them in their proper place at the proper time. I like women to be women."

"Do you?" she said.

"Look," said Jim. "This is a mission hospital. Take it easy, Sally."

"Do you remember the time we went to Takadoc beach? Do you remember, Jim?"

He sighed. "Yes, I remember." He let himself slip into that treacherous sentimental memory . . .

* * *

DYSPEPTIC

You may *find marriage more hectic*
Than you expectic.

ROD MACLEAN

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A FAR-AWAY GUITAR

"Go on," said Mr. Widmer. "What voices can't do, music can"

by RAY BRADBURY

OLD Miss Bidwell used to sit with a lemonade glass in her hand in her squeaking rocker on the porch of her house on Saint James Street every summer night from seven until nine. At nine, you could hear the front door tap shut, the brass key turn in the lock, the blinds rustle down, and the lights click out.

Her routine varied in no detail; she lived alone with a house full of rococo pictures, a dusty library, a yellow-mouthed piano, and a music box which, when she wound it up and set it going, prickled the air like the bubbles from lemon soda pop. Miss Bidwell had a nod for everyone walking by, and it was interesting that her house had no front steps leading up to its wooden porch. No front steps, and no back steps. For Miss Bidwell hadn't left her house in forty years. In the year 1911, she had had the back and the front steps completely torn down and the porches railed in.

In the autumn—the closing-up, the nailing-in, the hiding-away time—she would have one last lemonade on her cooling, bleak porch; then she would carry her wicker chair inside, and no one would see her again until the next spring.

"There she goes," said Mr. Widmer, the grocer, pointing with the red apple in his hand. "Take a good look at her." He tapped the wall calendar. "Nine o'clock of an evening in the month of September, the day after Labour Day."

Several customers peered over at Miss Bidwell's house. There was the old lady, looking around for a final time; then she went inside.

"Won't see her again until May first," said Mr. Widmer. "There's a trap door in her kitchen wall. I unlock that trap door and shove the groceries in. There's an envelope there, with money in it and a list of the things she wants. I never see her."

"What's she do all winter?"

"Only the Lord knows. She's had a 'phone for forty years and never used it."

Miss Bidwell's house was dark.

Mr. Widmer bit into his apple, enjoying its crisp succulence. "Forty years ago, she had the front steps taken away."

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"Why? Folks die?"

"They died before that."

"Husband or children die?"

"Never had no children nor husband. She held hands with a young man who had all kinds of notions about travelling. They were going to be married. He used to sit and play the guitar and sing to her on that porch. One day he just went to the railway station and bought one ticket for Arizona, California, and China."

"That's a long time for a woman to carry a torch."

They laughed quietly and solemnly, for it was a sad admission they had made.

"Suppose she'll *ever* come out?"

"When you're *seventy?* All I do every year is wait for the first of May. If she don't come out on the porch that day and set up her chair, I'll know for sure she's dead. Then I'll 'phone the police."

"Good night," said everyone, and left Mr. Widmer alone in the grey light of his grocery shop.

Mr. Widmer put on his coat and listened to the whining of the wind grow stronger. Yes, every year. And every year at this time he'd watched the old woman become more of an old woman. She was as remote as one of those barometers where the woman comes out for fair weather and the man appears for bad. But what a broken instrument, with only the woman coming out and coming out alone, and never a man at all, for bad or for better. How many thousands of July and August nights had he seen her there, beyond her moat of green grass which was as impassable as a crocodile stream? Forty years of small-town nights. How much might they weigh if put to the scale? A feather to himself, but how much to *her?*

Mr. Widmer was putting on his hat when he saw the man.

The man came along the street, on the other side: an old man, dim in the light of the single corner street lamp. He was looking at all the house numbers, and when he came to the corner house, number 11, he stopped and looked at the lightless windows.

"It couldn't be," said Mr. Widmer. He turned out the light and stood in the warm grocery smell of his shop, watching the old man through the plate glass. "Not after this much time." He shook his head. It was much more than ridiculous, for hadn't he felt his heart quicken at least once a day, every day, for four decades whenever he saw a man pass or pause by Miss Bidwell's? Every man in the history of the town who so much as tied a shoelace in front of her locked house had been a source of wonder to Mr. Widmer.

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"Are *you* the young man who ran off and left our Miss Bidwell?" he cried to himself.

Once, thirty years ago, white apron flapping, he had run across the brick street to confront a young man. "Well, so you came back!"

"What?" the young man said.

"Aren't you Mr. Robert Farr, the one who brought her red carnations and played the guitar and sang?"

"The name's Corley," and the young man drew forth silk samples to display and sell.

As the years passed, Mr. Widmer had become frightened about one thing: Suppose Mr. Farr *did* come back some day, how was he to be recognized? In his mind, Mr. Widmer remembered the man as striding and young and very clean-faced. But forty years could peel a man away and dry his bones and tighten his flesh into a fine, acid etching. Perhaps some day Mr. Farr might return, like a hound to old trails, and, because of Mr. Widmer's negligence, think the house locked and buried deep in another century, and go away, never the wiser. Perhaps it had happened *already*!

There stood the man, the old man, the unbelievable man, at nine-fifteen in the evening of the day after Labour Day in September. There was a slight bend to his knees and his back, and his face was turned to the Bidwell house.

"One last try," said Mr. Widmer. "Sticking my nose in."

He stepped lightly over the cool brick street and reached the farther kerb. The old man turned towards him.

"'Evening," said Mr. Widmer.

"I wonder if you could help me?" said the old man. "Is this the old Bidwell house?"

"Yes."

"Does anyone live there?"

"Miss Ann Bidwell, she's still there."

"Thank you."

"Good night." And Mr. Widmer walked off, his heart pounding, cursing himself. Why didn't you ask him, you idiot! Why didn't you say, Mr. Farr? Is that you, Mr. Farr?

But he knew the answer. This time, he wanted it to *be* Mr. Farr. And the only way to insure that it *was* Mr. Farr was not to shatter the thin bubble of reality. Asking outright might have evoked an answer which would have crushed him all over again. No, I'm not Mr. Farr; no, I'm not him. But *this* way, by *not* asking, Mr. Widmer could go to his home tonight, could lie in his upstairs bed, and, for an hour or so, could imagine, with an ancient and implausible tinge of romanticism, that at last the wandering man had come home from long trackways of travelling and long

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years of other cities and other worlds. This sort of lie was the most pleasant in which to indulge. You don't ask a dream if it is real, or you wake up. All right then, let that man—bill collector, dustman, or whatever—for this night, at least, assume the identity of a lost person.

Mr. Widmer walked back across the street, around the side of his shop, and up the narrow, dark stairs to where his wife was already in bed, asleep.

"Suppose it *is* him," he thought, in bed. "And he's knocking on the house sides, knocking on the back door with a broom handle, tapping at the windows, calling her on the 'phone, leaving his card poked under the doors, suppose?"

He turned on his side.

"Will she answer?" he wondered. "Will she pay attention, will she do anything? Or will she just sit in her house with the fenced-in porch and no steps going up or down to the door, and let him knock and call her name?"

He turned on his other side.

"Will we see her again next May first, and not until then? And will he wait until then . . . six months of knocking and calling her name and waiting?"

He got up and went to the window. There, far away over the green lawns, at the base of the huge, black house, by the porch which had no steps, stood the old man. And was it imagination or was his voice calling, calling there under the autumn trees, at the lightless windows?

The next morning, very early, Mr. Widmer looked down at Miss Bidwell's lawn.

It was empty. "I doubt if he was even there," said Mr. Widmer. "I doubt I even talked to anyone but a lamp post. That apple was half cider; it turned my head."

It was seven o'clock; Mrs. Terle and Mrs. Adams came into the cold shop for bacon and eggs and milk. Mr. Widmer edged round the subject. "Say, you didn't see no prowlers near Miss Bidwell's last night, did you?"

"Were there some?" cried the ladies.

"Thought I saw some."

"I didn't see no one," they said.

"It was the apple," murmured Mr. Widmer. "Pure cider."

The door slammed, and Mr. Widmer felt his spirits slump. Only he had seen, and the seeing must have been the rusted product of too many years of trying to live out another person's life.

The streets were empty, but the town was slowly arising to life. The sun was a reddish ball over the courthouse clock. Dew

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still lay on everything in a cool blanket. Dew stood in bubbles on every grass blade, on every silent red brick; dripped from the elms and the maples and the empty apple trees.

He walked slowly and carefully across the empty street and stood on Miss Bidwell's sidewalk. Her lawns, a vast green sea of dew that had fallen in the night, lay before him. Mr. Widmer felt again the warm pounding of his heart. For there, in the dew, circling and circling the house, where they had left fine, clear impressions, was a series of endless footprints, round and round, under the windows, near the bushes, at the doors. Footprints in the crystal grass, footprints that melted as the sun rose.

The day was a slow day. Mr. Widmer kept near the front of his shop, but saw nothing. At sunset, he sat smoking under the awning. "Maybe he's gone, maybe he'll never come back. She didn't answer. I know her. She's proud and old. The older the prouder, that's what they say. Maybe he's gone off on the train again. Why didn't I ask him his name? Why didn't I pound on the doors *with* him!"

But the fact remained that he hadn't asked and he hadn't pounded, and he felt himself the nucleus of a tragedy that was beginning to grow far beyond him.

"He won't come back. Not after all night walking round. He must have left just before dawn. Footsteps still fresh."

Eight o'clock. Eight-thirty. Nothing. Nine o'clock. Nine-thirty. Nothing. Mr. Widmer stayed open until quite late, even though there were no customers.

It was after eleven when he sat by the upstairs window of his home, not watching exactly, but not going to bed either.

At eleven-thirty, the clock struck softly, and the old man came along the street and stood before the house.

"Of course!" said Mr. Widmer to himself. "He's afraid someone will see him. He slept all day somewhere and waited. Afraid of what people might say. Look at him there, going round and round."

He listened. There was the calling again. Like the last cricket of the year, like the last rustle of the last oak leaf of the season. At the front door, at the back, at the bay windows. Oh, there would be a million slow footprints in the meadow lawn tomorrow when the sun rose.

Was she *listening?*

"Ann, Ann, oh, Ann!" was that what he called? "Ann, can you hear me, Ann?"—was that what you called when you came back very late in the day?

And then, suddenly, Mr. Widmer stood up.

Suppose she didn't *hear* him? How could he be sure that she

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was still *able* to hear ? Seventy years make for spider webs in the ears, grey waddings of time which dull everything for some people until they live in a universe of cotton and wool and silence. Nobody had spoken to her in thirty years save to open their mouths to say hello. What if she were deaf, lying there in her cold bed now like a little girl playing out a long and lonely game, never even aware that someone was tapping on the rattling windows, someone was calling through her flake-painted door, someone was walking on the soft grass round her locked house ? Perhaps not pride but a physical inability prevented her from answering !

In the living room, Mr. Widmer quietly took the 'phone off the hook, watching the bedroom door to be certain he hadn't wakened his wife. To the operator he said, " Helen ? Give me 729."

" That you, Mr. Widmer ? Funny time of night to call *her*."

" Never mind."

" All right, but she won't answer, never has. Don't recall she ever *has* used her 'phone in all the years after she had it put in."

The 'phone rang. It rang six times, and nothing happened.

" Keep trying, Helen."

The 'phone rang twelve times more. His face was streaming perspiration. Someone picked up the 'phone at the other end.

" Miss Bidwell ! " cried Mr. Widmer, almost collapsing in relief. " Miss Bidwell ? " he lowered his voice. " This is Mr. Widmer, the grocer, calling."

No answer. She was on the other end, in her house, standing in the dark. Through his window he could see that her house was still unlit. She hadn't switched on any lights to find the 'phone.

" Miss Bidwell, do you hear me ? " he asked.

Silence.

" Miss Bidwell, I want you to do me a favour," he said.

Click.

" I want you to open your front door and look out," he said.

" She's hung up," said Helen. " Want me to call her again ? "

" No thanks." He put the receiver back on the hook.

There was the house, in the morning sun, in the afternoon sun, and in the twilight—silent. Here was the grocery, with Mr. Widmer in it, thinking : she's a fool. No matter what, she's a fool. It's never too late. No matter how old, wrinkled hands are better than none. He's travelled a long way, and, by his look, he's never married but always travelled, as some men do, crazy to change their scenery every week, every month, every year, until they reach an age where they find they are collecting nothing at all but a lot of empty trips and a lot of towns with no more substance to them than movie sets and a lot of people in those towns who are about as

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real as wax dummies seen in lighted windows late at night as you pass by on a slow, black train.

He's been living with a world of people who didn't care about him because he never stayed anywhere long enough to make anyone worry whether he would rise in the morning or whether he had turned to dust. And then he got to thinking about her and decided that she was the one real person he'd ever known. And just a little too late, he took a train and got off and walked up here, and there he is on her lawn, feeling like a fool, and one more night of this and he won't come back at all.

This was the third night. Mr. Widmer thought of going over, of setting fire to the porch of Miss Bidwell's house, and of causing the firemen to roar up. That would bring her out, right into the old man's arms, by Jupiter!

But wait! Ah, but wait.

Mr. Widmer's eyes went to the ceiling. Up there, in the attic—wasn't there a weapon there to be used against pride and time? In all that dust, wasn't there something with which to strike out? Something as old as all of them—Mr. Widmer, the old man, the old lady? How long since the attic has been cleaned out? Never.

But it was too ridiculous. He wouldn't dare!

And yet, this was the last night. A weapon *must* be provided.

Ten minutes later, he heard his wife cry out to him, "Tom, Tom! What's that noise! What are you doing in the attic?"

At eleven-thirty, there was the old man. He stood in front of the stepless house as if not knowing what to try next. And then he took a quick step and looked down.

Mr. Widmer, from his upstairs window, whispered, "Yes, yes, go ahead."

The old man bent over.

"Pick it up!" cried Mr. Widmer to himself.

The old man extended his hands.

"Brush it off! I know, I know it's dusty; but it's still fair enough. Brush it off, *use* it!"

In the moonlight, the old man held a guitar in his hands. It had been lying in the middle of the lawn. There was a period of long waiting while the old man turned it over with his fingers.

"Go on!" said Mr. Widmer, silently.

There was a tentative chord of music.

"Go on!" said Mr. Widmer. "What voices can't do, music can. That's it. Play! You're right, try it!" urged Mr. Widmer.

And he thought: sing under the windows, sing under the apple trees and near the back porch, sing until the guitar notes shake her, sing until she starts to cry. You get a woman to crying, and you're

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on safe ground. Her pride will all wash away; and the best thing to start the dissolving and crying is music. Sing songs, sing "Genevieve, Sweet Genevieve, the years may come the years may go," and sing "Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland," and sing "We Were Sailing Along on Moonlight Bay," and sing "There's a Long, Long Trail Awinding," and sing all those old summer songs and old-time songs, any song that's old and quiet and lovely; sing soft and light, with a few notes of the guitar; sing and play and perhaps you'll hear the key turn in the lock!

He listened.

As pure as drops of water falling in the night, the guitar played, softly, softly, and it was half an hour before the old man began to sing, and it was so faint that no one could hear; no one except someone behind a wall in that house, in a bed, or standing in the dark behind a shaded window.

Mr. Widmer went to bed, numb, and lay there for an hour, hearing the far-away guitar.

The next morning, Mrs. Terle said, "I seen that prowler."

"Yes?"

"He was there all night. Playing a guitar. Can you imagine? How silly can old people get? Who *is* he, anyway?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Mr. Widmer.

"Well, him and his guitar went away down the street at six this morning," said Mrs. Terle.

"Didn't the door open for him?"

"No. Should it?"

"I suppose not. He'll be back tonight."

Tonight will do it, thought Mr. Widmer. Tonight, just one more night. He's not the sort to give up now. Now that he has the guitar, he'll be back, and tonight will do it. Mr. Widmer whistled, moving about the shop.

A van drove up outside, and Mr. Frank Henderson climbed out, a kit of hammers and nails and a saw in his hands. He went round the van and took out a couple of dozen fresh-cut new pieces of raw, good-smelling timber.

"Morning, Frank," called Mr. Widmer. "How's the carpentry business?"

"Picking up this morning," said Frank. He sorted out the good yellow wood and the bright steel nails. "Got a job."

"Where?"

"Miss Bidwell's."

"Yes?" Mr. Widmer felt his heart begin the familiar pounding.

"Yes. She 'phoned an hour ago. Wants me to build a new set of steps on to her front porch. Wants it done today."

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Mr. Widmer stood looking at the carpenter's hands, at the hammers and nails, and the good, fresh, clean wood. The sun was rising higher and the day was bright.

"Here," said Mr. Widmer, picking up some of the wood. "Let me help."

They walked together, carrying the fine timber, across the green lawn, under the trees, towards the waiting house and the waiting, stepless porch. And they were smiling.

* * *

RICH AND STRANGE

"Curiouser and curiouser!" you may well remark with Alice, as you unmask this company of eccentrics in literature. Allow one mark for the character, one for the source and one for the author, making a total of twenty-seven. The answers are on page 90.

1. *This Serbian artillery officer preferred chocolate creams to cartridges in his ammunition box. So disappointing to ladies hungering for romance!*
2. *In this lonely house the wedding breakfast was laid, but there were no guests; the bride wore her wedding dress, but there was no groom; and all the clocks had stopped at twenty to nine.*
3. *Born and bred a lusty fighter he yet chose to spend his days beneath a cork tree indulging in a much more peaceful occupation.*
4. *As if life were one long game of chess this English gentleman made goodness knows how many moves. On one occasion "he went . . . to the very pretty house that had been lent him in Fulford Road, and left it the same evening as he could not sleep."*
5. *He was an amiable old gentleman who persisted in a strenuous daily exercise calculated to affect his brain. He claimed, however, that it didn't, because he hadn't got one!*
6. *This roistering adventurer got lost in a snowstorm and made the mistake of tying his nag to what he thought was a post. Morning revealed the curious result of his misapprehension.*
7. *Fishy, this lady's choice of footgear, and it certainly brought her to a watery end.*
8. *The very flower of knightly chivalry, this old country gentleman fought a losing battle against unconscious enemies.*
9. *Bacon rationing would have been no problem to this charmer! Only one man found a way to stop her excursions into a classical Black Market.*

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BY MOON AND CANDLELIGHT

I don't believe in ghosts, but I've been afraid of them all my life

CHARLES A. DANA

Prayer unsaid, and mass unsung,
Deadman's dirge must still be rung :
Dingle-dong, the dead-bells sound !
Mermen chant his dirge around !

Wash him bloodless, smoothe him fair,
Stretch his limbs, and sleek his hair :
Dingle-dong, the dead-bells go !
Mermen swing them to and fro !

In the wormless sands shall he
Feast for no foul gluttons be :
Dingle-dong, the dead-bells chime !
Mermen keep the tone and time !

We must with a tombstone brave
Keep the shark out from his grave :
Dingle-dong, the dead-bells toll !
Mermen dirgers ring his knoll !

Such a slab will we lay o'er him
All the dead shall rise before him :
Dingle-dong, the dead-bells boom !
Mermen lay him in his tomb !

GEORGE DARLEY, 1795–1846

One Too Many

Out of the magic cave of Cruachu also came these pigs. Neither corn nor grass nor leaf would grow in any place that they frequented. Wherever they were being counted, they would not stay, but if anyone tried to count them they would go to another land. They were never completely counted ; but " There are three," said one ; " More, seven," said another ; " There are nine there," said another ; " Eleven pigs " ; " Thirteen pigs." In that way it was impossible to count them. Moreover, they could not be killed, for if they were shot at they would disappear. Once upon a time Medhbh of Cruachu and Ailill went to count them, in Magh

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Mucraimhe. They were counted by them then. Medhbh was in her chariot; one of the pigs leaped over the chariot. "That pig is one too many, Medhbh," said everyone. "Not this one," said Medhbh, seizing the pig's leg, so that its skin split on its forehead and it left the skin in her hand with the leg; and it is not known where they went after that.

Translated from the Irish, Ninth or Tenth Century, by KENNETH HURLSTONE JACKSON, *in A Celtic Miscellany*

Midnight

About midnight my heart began
To trip again and knock.
The tattered ghost of a tall man
Looked fierce at me as in he ran,
But fiercer at the clock.
It was, he swore, a long, long while
Until he'd had the luck
To die and make his domicile
On some ungeographic isle
Where no hour ever struck.
"But now, you worst of clocks," said he,
"Delayer of all love,
In vengeance I've recrossed the sea
To jerk at your machinery
And give your hands a shove."
So impotently he groped and peered
That his whole body shook!
I could not laugh at him; I feared
This was no ghost but my own weird,
And closer dared not look.

ROBERT GRAVES, *Poems and Satires 1951*

Nightmare

He (Wilkins) dreamt that he was going to London and had decided to visit his home in Gloucestershire first. Arriving there, he found the front door locked, so he went round to the back. Finding no one downstairs, he went up to his parents' bedroom, where he found his father sleeping but his mother still awake. He said to her: "Mother, I am going on a long journey and am come to bid you good-bye." She was very much frightened and answered: "Oh, dear son, thou art dead!"

At this point he woke up, and subsequently thought no more about the matter.

CHRISTINA HOLE, *Haunted England*

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Double Vision

"You say that you can only half see by moonlight," I remarked, "but you can see a great deal more than most men—than myself, for instance, when I am out at night."

"Perhaps I can, but it is all happy-go-luck work. When the moon is about nine days old no man can believe his eyes . . . I was lying on the bank called 'Old Shells' one bright night, and a gentleman with me was lying a hundred yards off in a shallow hole in the mud, when a pair of mallards walked in between us. After we got up to go home, I said to him:

"'Didn't you see nothing?'

"'No,' he said.

"'What, nothing at all? Not that pair o' ducks?'

"'No,' he said; 'I only see a man and a boy go past.' It was them two mallards he saw."

C. J. CORNISH, *Nights with an Old Gunner*

The Voice

First he heard only the sound of his footsteps on the floor,
then he heard the night-wind rattling and feeling at the door,
next he heard the worms gnawing in the old beams overhead,
but at the last something moved and something said,

"Why did you open what was closed?
Why did you waken what was asleep?
Why did you arouse the unaroused
and weep for that which cannot weep?

"I had a heart when I was flesh,
but where is it now when I am bone?
I could have wept when I had eyes,
but now my skull is an empty stone.

"Why did you know only that spell
to call, but not to master, too?
Why did you open the door for me
to do the thing which I must do?"

ELIZABETH COATSWORTH, *The Creaking Stair*

Legerdemain

Raise no more spirits than you can conjure down.

JOHN RAY, 1627-1705, *English Proverbs*

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A SUITOR FOR CLARA

Father had spoken and, so far as he was concerned, the subject was closed

by FREEMAN PHILLIPS

MY sister Clara's wedding to Martin Quinlan is still clear in my mind today although it took place a little over half a century ago. I was eleven then. I can still see my father and Martin Quinlan, two big men, glaring at each other out of the corners of their eyes as though only the fact that there were women and children present was keeping them from coming to blows.

And I can see my sister standing between them at the altar, serenely oblivious to the scandalized hum of conversation that went on all through the ceremony. Clara was twenty-eight and the general opinion was that she was very lucky to have acquired a husband at that age, regardless of how. But I knew that luck had had little to do with bringing the wedding about. The credit for that went to my mother . . .

My mother was a gentle woman, with smooth brown hair only lightly touched with grey, and a warm, quiet smile. Although she had a great deal of poise, she was always a little shy with strangers, perhaps because of the sheltered life she led. She had married when she was seventeen and left the home of one strict, domineering man for that of another.

She hated arguing or wrangling of any sort, and in most matters, in order to maintain peace, she deferred readily to Father's wishes. However, on the few occasions when she found it necessary to oppose him, she displayed an iron determination which was more than a match for his own. One of those occasions was when Clara wanted to go to work. That was shortly after her twenty-seventh birthday.

Clara was pretty enough—she had thick blonde hair and blue eyes—but she was also strong-willed and independent, and this had discouraged most of the young men who came to call on her. She was bored with staying at home and she wanted to get a job in a business office.

Father, of course, was dead against it, but Mother sided with Clara, I suppose because she hoped that in the business world my

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sister would meet a man who suited her. At any rate, in her quietly determined way, she went to work on Father and, after a stormy week, she got his permission. Clara went to a secretarial school for a few months and then Father got her a job with Webster and Webster, an accounting firm which he considered to be reliable. It was there that my sister met and fell in love with Martin Quinlan, an occurrence which permanently shook my father's faith in the Messrs. Webster.

Our first meeting with Martin Quinlan was a memorable one.

The evening before it, Clara had announced that she'd invited a young man to call. I remember the look of hopeful interest that came into Mother's eye as she said with studied casualness, " That's nice, dear. Is it anyone we know ? "

" No. I met him at work. He's a client of ours," Clara said. That was all she said, but they must have had some other way of communicating, for presently Mother went to the kitchen and began making a fruit cake, which was her speciality and reserved only for special occasions.

Quinlan arrived at our house the next evening at eight. He was a big, roughhewn man with a mop of shaggy red hair and the heavy, broad shoulders of one who'd laboured with his hands and back. He looked baffled, a little angry and acutely uncomfortable.

He had started the evening off with what must have seemed to him a horrible blunder. In his full baritone he had said, " Good evening, Mrs. Roper. I'm Martin Quinlan," to Katie, our maid, when she opened the door. Then, when he saw my mother and realized his mistake, he flushed painfully and even Mother's gentle smile couldn't quite put him at his ease.

His distress melted Mother's usual reserve with strangers. " Good evening, Mr. Quinlan. I'm so glad you could come. This is Mr. Roper, and Theodore—Mr. Quinlan."

He shook hands stiffly with Father and me.

" Clara ! " Mother yoo-hooed prettily up the stairs. " She'll be down in a moment, I'm sure. She's still busy with her hair, I'm afraid." She motioned him to the sofa and he sat down carefully, placing his big hands on his knees. " Dear me, hasn't it been warm these past few days," she said.

" Yes, very warm." There was a trace of an Irish brogue in his speech.

" Today was especially lovely, I thought. Although I'm always afraid when it gets warm so early in the season that it only leads to colds. Don't you think so, Mr. Quinlan ? "

" I very rarely catch cold."

" Oh, you're *so* fortunate, Mr. Quinlan," Mother cried passionately. " My family has always been very susceptible to colds."

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Clara's light step on the stairs a few minutes later was a relief to all of us. Mother had about exhausted the topic. Quinlan rose and looked accusingly at Clara, his expression seeming to say: You got me into this. Now, for the love of Heaven, get me out.

Clara, her eyes shining, came boldly close to him and smiled up into his face. "Hello, Martin," she said softly. "You've all got to know each other, I see."

"Yes," he admitted. Then a sudden, humorous grin softened the austerity of his face. "In a manner of speakin'."

He seemed to relax after that and conversation became easier. For a while it seemed that the evening would turn out passably after all. Mother served her fruit cake, which was delicious as always. And Quinlan said, with a blarney look in his eye, that while he didn't consider himself an expert on culinary matters, this was easily the best fruit cake he'd ever tasted and possibly the best in the world, which brought a pleased pink to Mother's cheeks. But then, during a brief lull in the conversation, the inevitable happened.

Father uncrossed his legs and leaned forward in his chair. "By the way, Mr. Quinlan, what line of business do you follow?"

It seemed a harmless enough question, but Clara drew in her breath sharply and stiffened in her chair. Quinlan glanced at her, then turned back to Father. "I'm connected with Motor Cars, sir," he said.

"Motor Cars?"

"Yes, sir. The Britannia Horseless Carriage Company. It's a new concern just formed last year. I'm the Engineer."

He might just as well have said: *I'm the devil*, for the effect it had. Father's eyebrows shot up, and Mother seemed to wilt a little. We all knew Father's views on horseless carriages. He lumped them, along with such things as trade unions and woman's suffrage, into one category labelled Dangerously Radical, and consigned them freely and often to hell. He had a healthy regard for his own opinions and no reticence about voicing them.

Mother coughed once and fidgeted nervously in her chair.

"The Britannia Horseless Carriage Company," my father began. "Well, well!"

"Oh, goodness, just look at the time!" Mother cried with startling vivacity. Father shot her a look of annoyance. "I had no idea. Teddy dear, hadn't you better be saying goodnight to Mr. Quinlan?"

"But, Mama—" I began in protest. I was usually allowed to stay up when we had company. "It's only a little after—"

Her voice bubbled right over mine. "It's late enough, dear. You have to go to school tomorrow."

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" But you always let me—"

It never took long to wear through my father's patience. " Theodore," he said. " And straight to bed, sir. No sitting on the stairs." He dismissed me with a nod, sent a warning glance to Mother, and rose, smiling toothily. " And now, Mr. Quinlan, I'm —ah—quite interested in these Motor Cars of yours. Perhaps you'd be kind enough to clear up a few little questions."

It was a technique I later saw him use many times in court. With a bland smile on his square, slightly horsy face, he would pleasantly lead a witness straight into a trap. Then, in full-throated rage, he would pounce, waving his forefinger like an avenging sword under the victim's nose.

Martin Quinlan's " Certainly, sir," sounded wary.

" Fine," Father said. " Would you care for some more cake ? No ? " He laughed a mellow laugh. " It *is* rich. Ah, did I understand you to say you were the Engineer ? "

" That's correct."

" Quite an important position for so young a man."

" I worked for it."

" Of course." Father sounded pleased, as though he'd wormed a damaging admission out of Quinlan. " One could hardly expect to start at the top." His pacing had led him to where he could see the top of the stairs, where I sat, trying to decide whether or not to remain. His quick glance made up my mind for me. " I read in the paper the other day that two young good-for-nothings had actually propelled one of these infernal machines, these noisy, smelly devils of destruction, along the public highway at thirteen miles an hour. The magistrate fined them. *Fined* them ! If I'd had my way . . ." His voice grew indistinct as he paced back into the parlour.

In bed, I tried to hear what was going on but only an occasional word penetrated to my room, which was at the back. I fell asleep and dreamed I was on a sinking ship, where there was much shouting and pounding going on. I woke up, wide-eyed, at the height of the argument, to hear Quinlan's voice, loud enough to shake the pictures on the wall and thick with the brogue, demanding hotly, " And what the devil do *you* know about it ? Because of people like you—stuffy, hidebound, can't see an inch in front of your nose—France, yes and America, too, are getting ahead of us. A glorious new industry and damned miserable old diehards like you have to stand in the way ! "

There was an angry, indistinct rumble from my father ; then I heard Quinlan again. " Immigrants and revolutionaries, is it ? Sure, and it's only out of respect for your advanced age that I don't ask you to step out in the street and repeat that last statement ! "

I jumped out of bed and hurried to the head of the stairs just in time to meet Clara, who was running to her room, weeping so hard

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she never saw me. Father and Quinlan were chin to chin at the front door, both talking at once, and Mother, pale and harried, hovered around, saying, "Please Albert, Mr. Quinlan!"

She flung open the door and desperately half pushed, half manœuvred Quinlan out of the house. She sighed and for a moment there was silence. But Father was much too wound up to stop there.

"By thunder, if that rascally Irishman ever shows his face in here again—"

He was still going strong as he and Mother went up to bed. "This is what comes of allowing an innocent young girl to work in an office. I warned you, Millie. But you had to have your way."

Breakfast the next morning was an uncomfortable meal. Only Father appeared not to feel it. He ate his usual hearty breakfast, reading aloud from the paper to Mother as he always did, steadfastly refusing to notice that Clara spoke to him only when it was absolutely necessary. He mentioned nothing about what had happened the night before. But when he was rising to go he said to Clara, "It won't be necessary for you to make the trip into town this morning. I shall convey your message to Mr. Webster that you are no longer able to continue in his employ."

Clara stiffened and drew herself up, her eyes flashing. But she said nothing. She sat so until the closing of the door told us Father was out of the house. Then she slumped forward on the table, sobbing.

"Now I'll never see him again. Never! Oh, Mama, I wish I could die!" she cried, and she ran out of the kitchen.

Mother stood looking at the door through which Clara had gone, her eyes deeply troubled. I left quietly to look for my books. I had just started upstairs when Mother called, "Teddy, wait."

I came back to the kitchen.

"Teddy, you're not to go to school today. I want you to go somewhere with me."

I could hardly believe my ears. "Hooray!" I began. She shushed me hastily. "No one is to know about this, Ted."

"But, Mama—" I began, puzzled. But she was already on her way upstairs to get dressed.

A few minutes later we stole out of the house and started briskly towards the high street.

It was a long cab drive through the town. We left the nicer sections of the city and drove through dingy, crowded, slightly sinister-looking streets. I thought I knew then why my mother had wanted me to come along. She wanted me to protect her. My chest swelled a little as we got out of the cab.

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In front of us was a wide gateway with a sign painted on a cross-bar overhead: THE BRITANNIA HORSELESS CARRIAGE COMPANY. Through the gateway was a large yard and in the distance stood an ugly square building of red brick. Mother closed her eyes for a moment as though she were saying a prayer, for there before us in the yard was a vast crowd of big men in work clothes and best clothes, cloth caps, straw boaters and silk hats, shouting with excitement and gathered round a procession of Mr. Quinlan's revolutionary carriages, all shapes and colours and sizes.

We went through the gateway and across the yard, my mother looking straight ahead and pretending not to notice the men who were now too busy climbing into the carriages to pay us any attention. A few men were standing outside one of the doorways into the red brick building. They turned to look at us and Mother's hand tightened on mine as we walked towards them to ask directions.

"Mr. Quinlan?" one of them said. "Yes, ma'am. Right through there, down the corridor. First office on your right."

"Thank you." We hurried away in the direction he'd pointed, and stopped before a wired-glass door on which was printed: Martin Quinlan, Private. Mother rapped and we heard the unmistakable voice from inside say, "Yes. Come in."

"Be with you in a second," he said without looking up. "I have to go with the outing in a few minutes." He was alone, busy writing at his littered desk.

My mother waited, pale and determined, until he finished.

"Well, now—" He tossed his pen aside, looked up, and stared. "Mrs. Roper—"

"Good morning, Mr. Quinlan."

"What the devil—?" He rose, frowning. Then the corners of his mouth tucked in ironically. "And to what happy circumstance do I owe this honour, may I ask?"

She tighted her lips, ignoring his sarcasm. "May I sit down?"

"Oh, by all means." He motioned towards the wooden chair beside his desk. She sat down and folded her hands in her lap. He watched her in silence. Mother returned his stare for a moment; then she sighed and glanced heavenward.

"Mr. Quinlan," she said patiently, "I came here to discuss a matter which is important to both of us, I think. It would certainly help if you'd stop behaving like a sulky schoolboy."

He grunted. "Well, I'm listening."

"It's about Clara," she said. "I'd like to know what your intentions are towards Clara."

Martin Quinlan's eyebrows shot up. "Intentions," he said. "Intentions! I have *no* intentions towards Clara! I'm a busy man.

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I have no time to waste on a contrary, frivolous female, nor either on her asinine, stuffed shirt of an old man who—"

"Mr. Quinlan!"

He shrugged and turned away. "And you can go right back and tell her I said so," he finished. He shoved his hands in his pockets and paced furiously before his desk for a space. Then he stopped in front of her again. "How is she?"

"Very well, thank you."

"Good. And so am I." He resumed his pacing.

"For Heaven's sake, stand still," Mother said. "Do you want to see Clara again?"

That stopped him. He squinted narrowly at her. "Does she want to see me?"

"I think so."

It took a minute for him to digest that; then he said guardedly, "If that's true, which I very much doubt, why doesn't she get in touch with me herself?"

"Have you any idea how badly you behaved last night?" Mother said. "Shouting and carrying on like that?"

"Oh, and that was all *my* fault, I suppose!"

She dropped her hands in her lap impatiently. "Well, you certainly didn't help things much," she cried.

"No, but it takes *two* to make a quarrel and—" He stopped abruptly, looked at my mother, then down at her hands. He sank into a chair and slowly a contrite grin spread over his face. "I've got no argument with you there," he said mildly. It was at that moment that I began to like him. He sat for a while, staring at the floor and frowning. "I mean well," he went on finally, "but I'm a proud, hot-tempered man without enough of God's good sense to keep my big trap shut." Then, looking up eagerly, he asked, "How do you know she wants to see me? Did she say so right out?"

"No, Martin." Smiling, my mother rose and went to him. She placed her hand gently on his shoulder. "But you can take my word for it. And I think you're in love with her, aren't you?"

"I've been telling myself all morning how much I hate her," he said ruefully. "I guess that's a good sign. When can I see her?"

"I don't know. I'll have to arrange something," she said. She thought awhile. "Perhaps this week-end. I could send her to visit her aunt in Hertfordshire. You could see her there."

His eyes on her face were almost reverent. "I can never tell you how grateful I am," he said softly. "Or what a wonderful woman I think you are."

"Nonsense, Martin." She smiled.

My mother had a habit of chewing her lip when something

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worried her. She began doing that now. I knew what was on her mind. "How am I ever going to handle Mr. Roper?" she said, thinking aloud.

Martin Quinlan walked back with us to the street.

While we walked, she questioned him about his work, listening interestedly to all he told her and seeming to be weighing what he said against Father's ideas.

We passed the horseless carriage procession which was now nearly ready to move off. Quinlan told us they had had some trouble with the men. They might have had a strike, he said, had one of the managers not hit on the happy idea of an outing to Richmond in the Company's products. Mother wanted to know all about it.

"I don't have a chance to see things like this very often," she said.

A cab was just coming up the street when we finally got to the gateway. Mother said good-bye to Quinlan and told him she would get into touch with him. He handed her gallantly into the cab, then hopped on to the step himself and planted a kiss flush on her cheek. "Ye're a broth of a girl," he said, grinning, and hopped off just as the cab started to move.

"Clara will be glad to see Mr. Quinlan again, won't she; Mama?" I said, once we were seated.

Mother turned to me hastily. "Teddy, remember now. You're to say nothing about this. Especially not to Clara."

At home again, Mother simply said that we'd been shopping, and Clara was too wrapped up in her own troubles to notice that we'd come back with our arms empty. Mother said to me, "Go out to the kitchen, dear, and get a piece of cake and a glass of milk," which sounded like a good idea. But as I stepped out of the room I heard her begin brightly, "Clara, you'll never guess who we ran into this afternoon." So, of course, I stayed and listened.

I'd heard Mother tell little fibs to Father once in a while, but she must have spent all the long cab drive thinking out the one she told Clara that day. It was a whopper.

Mother and Clara, both very gay and excited, were still in the parlour when Father came home. Father raised his eyebrows and said, "Why in thunder do you want to go to your Aunt Celia? I thought you didn't like her."

Clara smiled and Mother said, "Of course she likes Celia, Albert. What a thing to say. It will do her good to get away from home for a few days."

Father shrugged and said, "H'mm," once or twice, and nothing more. Clara left the next morning.

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All that day Mother was excited and nervous. When I came home from school, she stared at me absently for a moment as though it took an effort to bring her mind back to where she was, and then, for no reason, she gave me a big hug and a kiss. That evening, even my father, who rarely noticed people's moods, demanded to know what the devil was eating her.

She was the same on Saturday: distracted, listening for the doorbell to ring. It finally did ring late in the afternoon. It was a boy with a message from Father saying he'd be half an hour late for dinner.

He arrived just as Mother was setting the table. Katie went to the door. I heard her say, "Oh, dear," apprehensively. Then, Father was standing in the entrance to the dining room, with Clara, red-eyed and tragic, behind him.

"Mama—" she whimpered, then burst into sobs as she turned and ran upstairs to her room.

"I thought I'd better take a ride out to Hertfordshire," Father said. "It's fortunate that I did." He was very angry.

Mother stared dumbly at him.

"Who do you suppose was there with Clara when I arrived?" he demanded, his voice rising. We didn't have to suppose. "How in the name of Heaven could such a thing happen to me?" he shouted. "Deceived by my own daughter and that thieving, treacherous, blackhearted revolutionary." He stamped around the room, waving his fists in the air and shouting.

Mother waited, white-faced but composed, for a chance to speak. Then she told him.

"Whatever deception there was, Albert, it was my doing. I arranged it all. I gave Martin permission to call on Clara."

The shock of that took him off balance. His mouth fell open and he dropped into a chair.

"*You*, Millie?"

Mother nodded. "Yes, Albert. I think Martin is a fine man and will make Clara a good husband. And I think it's wrong of you to feel about him as you do. I went to see him and—"

"What!" Father was on his feet again. "Have you gone out of your mind?"

"I went to see him," Mother persisted, "to talk to him about Clara."

"For Heaven's sake, Millie!"

"And I think—"

"That's enough!" Father shouted. He clasped his hands behind his back and angrily paced the room. "Apparently I didn't make myself quite clear on this matter. So, to avoid any future misunderstandings: I flatly forbid you or anyone else in this house

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ever to see, speak to, or even speak about this man Quinlan again. Is that clear? And furthermore, in regard to—"

But Mother didn't wait for any more. Without a word, she stripped off her apron and tossed it on the chair. She turned and stalked out of the room towards the stairs.

"I've not finished, Millie." Father followed after her. "What are you doing?"

"I believe," she said without stopping, "that Martin would call it a strike!" She ran into the spare room, slammed the door shut and turned the lock.

Father went up the steps three at a time. He pounded on the locked door with his fist. "Millie, come out of there! Stop this nonsense immediately. Do you hear?"

I was standing at the foot of the stairs. I heard her voice, muffled by the door, answer, "I'll come out when you agree to discuss this matter calmly and sensibly."

"I've done all the discussing I intend to do!" Father shouted. And when there was no answer: "All right, you can stay in there until you come to your senses."

Katie served dinner. It was a silent meal except when Father burned his tongue on the soup because Katie had forgotten that he liked it cooled before it was brought to the table.

After dinner, Katie went upstairs with a tray of food. Father glowered at her, but he said nothing.

Mother stayed in the spare room all day Sunday. Katie brought her meals up. Father got angrier each time he saw her going up the stairs with a tray. Finally, when she was taking dinner up, he stopped her.

"Where are you going with that tray?"

"You know very well."

"Well, it won't be necessary," Father said. "If she's hungry she can come down and eat like anyone else."

"I don't know anything about that," Katie said. "But as long as I'm in this house she's not going to stay there and starve, poor dear." And she started upstairs.

"Stop!" Father shouted. "If you go up with that food you needn't bother to come in to work tomorrow, do you hear?"

"That's all right with me, Mr. Roper," Katie said. She went up and rapped on Mother's door. "It's me, Mrs. Roper."

"You're dismissed!" Father shouted.

She left soon after, saying good-bye to Father in an angry voice and slamming the door. Father said, "Good riddance," and sat, glowering, in his chair for a while; then he slammed his hands down on the chair arms and rose. "Dammit!" he said. He strode

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to the stairs and mounted them. He banged on Mother's door. "Millie, I've had enough of this. Come on out of there."

"You know my conditions, Albert."

"The devil with your conditions. Either you come out or I'll break in the door!"

There was a tense silence.

"All right!" Father shouted. We heard him back away a step or two. "This is your last chance, Millie. Are you coming out?" He waited a moment more, then he lunged.

"Albert. No! You'll hurt yourself," we heard Mother scream. But it was too late. There was a great crash, a shout of pain from Father and then the noise of bottles falling off the dressing table. Clara and I hurried upstairs. There was Father, sprawled face downwards on the floor of the spare room, out for the count. What had happened was obvious. Mother had given in and opened the door at exactly the right time.

He had come to by the time Dr. Cleveland arrived, although he was still lying there groaning. It was nothing serious, the doctor said. Only a few minor bruises and a dislocated jaw. He just wouldn't be able to talk for a few days. The doctor got Father into bed and rolled yards of bandage around his head until all that showed were his eyes and nose. Dr. Cleveland said good-bye and Mother went with him to the door.

When she came back, she said, "Teddy, Clara," and nodded towards the door. As we obediently left the room, she turned back to Father, her hands on her hips.

"And now, Albert," she said, "you're going to listen to me whether you want to or not."

I stood beside my mother in the fragrant semi-gloom of the church, listening to the organ take up the slow strains of the wedding march. The low hum of conversation around us stopped.

"She's coming, Mama," I whispered.

We turned to see Clara and Father coming down the aisle. I had never thought of my sister as being beautiful, but she was beautiful that day. She looked tall and graceful, the colour came and went in her smooth cheeks, and there was a misty softness in her eyes.

Father's eyes fastened angrily on Martin Quinlan's broad back, and Martin, as though feeling his gaze, turned his head and sent a hard glance back in Father's direction. They were to enjoy their Sunday arguments together for many years to come.

My sister took her place at the altar beside Martin, and the ceremony began.

"Clara," I heard my mother murmur in a wavering voice. I looked up at her curiously. She sniffed and her round chin quivered.

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"Clara," she whimpered. "My little girl."

Her mouth curved down and, as I looked on, bewildered, tears welled up in her eyes and her fingers began fumbling at her bosom for a handkerchief.

* * *

ANSWERS to RICH AND STRANGE on page 75

1. *Bluntschli in the play, "Arms and the Man," by George Bernard Shaw. Chocolate creams sustained his morale in battle.*
2. *Miss Havisham in the novel, "Great Expectations," by Charles Dickens. Jilted on her wedding day, she had gone mad, and since then nothing had been changed in her house.*
3. *Ferdinand the Bull, who loved to smell flowers, in "The Story of Ferdinand," by Munro Leaf and Robert Lawson.*
4. *Sir George Sitwell, in "The Scarlet Tree," by Sir Osbert Sitwell. Sir George often slept in a different house each night.*
5. *Old Father William, who was for ever standing on his head, from the poem of that name in Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland."*
6. *Baron Münchausen in the book of that title by Rudolph Erich Raspe. When the snow melted, the Baron discovered that he had tied his horse to a church spire.*
7. *The heroine of the song, "My darling Clementine!" Her sandals were "herring boxes without topsies" and she "fell into the foaming brine."*
8. *Don Quixote in the novel, "Don Quixote de la Mancha," by Miguel Cervantes. He fought giants who turned out to be windmills.*
9. *Circe, in the Odyssey of Homer. Odysseus rescued his crew, who had been turned into swine by her enchantments.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 8, Inchcape. 9, Hasten. 10, Sue. 11, Iterates. 12, Corday. 13, Mothering Sunday. 15, Anxious. 18, Foremen. 21, Trusty followers. 24, Cicala. 25, Covering. 26, Lee. 27, Psyche. 28, Punchbag.

Down. 1, Initio. 2, Church. 3, Canterbury Tales. 4, Lessing. 5, The cost of living. 6, Estrange. 7, Separate. 14, Tax. 16, Narcissi. 17, Instance. 19, Mae. 20, Concept. 22, Worthy. 23, Rental.

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ROUNDING THE HORN

Trapped in the fury of this monster sea, we had become sailors in earnest

by DAVID BONE

ROUNDING Cape Horn from the eastward, setting to the teeth of the great west wind, to the shock and onset of towering seas; furious combination of the elements that sweep unchecked around the globe!

Days passed, and we fared no farther on. North we would go with the yards hard on the back-stays; to wear ship, and steer again south over the same track. Hopeless work it was, and only the prospect of a slant—a shift of wind that would let us to our journey—kept us hammering doggedly at the task.

Day after day of huge sea and swell, mountainous in calm or storm. Leaden-grey skies, with a brief glint of sunshine now and then—for it was nominally summer time in low latitudes. Days of gloomy calm, presage of a fiercer blow, when the Old Man (Orcadian philosopher that he was) caught and skilfully stuffed the great-winged albatross that flounders helplessly when the wind fails. Days of strong breezes, when we tried to beat to windward under a straining main-to'gal'n'sail; ever a west wind to thwart our best endeavours, and week-long gales, that we rode out, hove-to in the trough of overwhelming seas, lurching to leeward under low canvas.

We had become sailors in earnest.

We had forgotten the way of steady trades and flying-fish weather, and, when the wind howled a whole gale, we slapped our oilskin-clad thighs and lied cheerfully to each other of greater gales we had been in. Even Wee Laughlin and M'Innes were turned to some account and talked of sail and spars as if they had never known the reek of steamer smoke.

In the half-deck we had little comfort during watch below. At every lurch of the staggering barque, a flood of water poured through the crazy planking, and often we were washed out by an untimely opening of the door. Though at heart we would rather have been porters at a country railway station, we put a bold front to the hard times and slept with our wet clothes under us that they might be the less chilly for putting on at eight bells. We had seldom a stitch of dry clothing, and the galley looked like a corner of Paddy's market

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whenever McEwan, the "gallus" cook, took pity on our sodden misery.

In the forecastle the men were better off. Collins had rigged an affair of pipes to draw the smoke away, and it was possible, in all but the worst of weather, to keep the bogie-stove alight. We would gladly have shifted to these warmer quarters, but our parents had paid a premium for *privileged berthing*, and the Old Man would not hear of our flitting. Happily, we had little darkness to add to the misery of our passage, for the sun was far south, and we had only three hours of night. Yet, when the black squalls of snow and sleet rolled up from the westward, there was darkness enough.

At times a flaw in the wind—a brief veering to the south—would let us keep the ship travelling to the westward. All hands would be in high spirits; we would go below at the end of our watches, making light of sodden bedclothes, heartened that at last our "slant" had come.

Alas for our hopes! Before our watch was due we would be rudely wakened. "*All hands wear ship*"—the dreaded call, and the Mate thundering at the half-deck door, shouting orders in a threatening tone that called for instant spur. Then, at the braces, hanging to the ropes in a swirl of icy water, facing up to the driving sleet and bitter spray, that cut and stung like a whiplash. And when at last the yards were laid to the wind, and the order "*down helm*" was given, we would spring to the rigging for safety, and, clinging desperately, watch the furious sweep of a towering "greybeard" over the barque, as she came to the wind and lay-to.

Wild, heart-breaking work! Only the old hands, "hard cases" like Martin and Welsh John and the bosun, were the stoics, and there was some small comfort in their "Whoo! This ain't nuthin'! Ye sh'd a' bin shipmates with me in the ol' *Boryallus!*" (Or some such ancient craft.) "*Them* wos 'ard times!"

Twice we saw Diego Ramirez and the Iledefonsos, with an interval of a fortnight between the sightings—a cluster of bleak rocks, standing out of the surf and broken water, taking the relentless battery of huge seas that swept them from base to summit. Once, in clear weather, we marked a blue ridge of land far to the norrard, and Old Martin and Vootgert nearly came to blows as to whether it was Cape Horn or the False Cape.

Fighting hard for every inch of our laboured progress, doubling back, crossing, recrossing (our track on the old blue-back chart was a maze of lines and figures) we won our way to 70°W., and there, in the hardest gale of the passage, we were called on for tribute, for one more to the toll of sailor lives claimed by the rugged southern gateman.

All day the black ragged clouds had swept up from the south-

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west, the wind and sea had increased hourly in violence. At dusk we had shortened sail to topsails and reefed foresail. But the Old Man hung on to his canvas as the southing wind allowed us to go " full and by " to the nor'-west. Hurtling seas swept the decks, tearing stout fittings from their lashings. The crazy old half-deck seemed about to fetch loose with every sea that crashed aboard. From stem to stern there was no shelter from the growing fury of the gale ; but still the Old Man held to his course to make the most of the only proper " slant " in six weary weeks.

At midnight the wind was howling slaughter, and stout Old Jock, dismayed at last at the furious sea upreared against him, was at last forced to lay her to. In a piping squall of snow and sleet we set to haul up the foresail. Even the nigger could not find heart to rouse more than a mournful *i—o—ho* at the bunt-lines, as we slowly dragged the heavy slatting canvas to the yard. Intent on the work, we had no eye to the weather, and only the Captain and steersman saw the sweep of a monster sea that bore down on us, white-crested and curling.

" Stand by," yelled the Old Man. " Hang on, for your lives, men ! God ! Hold hard there ! "

Underfoot we felt the ship falter in swing—an ominous check in her lift to the heaving sea. Then out of the blackness to windward a swift towering crest reared up—a high wall of moving water, winged with leagues of tempest at its back. It struck us sheer on the broadside, and shattered its bulk aboard in a whelming torrent, brimming the decks with a weight that left no life in the labouring barque.

We were swept to leeward at the first shock, a huddled mass of writhing figures, and dashed to and fro with the sweep of the sea. Gradually, as the water cleared, we came by foothold again, sorely bruised and battered.

" Haul away again, men ! " The Mate, clearing the blood of a head wound from his eyes, was again at the foretack giving slack. " Hell, what ye standing at ? Haul away, blast ye ! Haul an' rouse her up ! "

Half-handed, we strained to raise the thundering canvas ; the rest, with the Second Mate, were labouring at the spare spar, under which Houston, an ordinary seaman, lay jammed with his thigh broken.

Pinching with handspikes, they got him out and carried aft, and joined us at the gear ; and at last the sail was hauled up. " *Aloft and furl,*" was the next order, and we sprang to the rigging in time to escape a second thundering " grey-beard."

It was dark, with a black squall making up to windward, as we laid out on the yard and grappled with the wet and heavy canvas.

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Once we had the sail up, but the wind that burst on us tore it from our stiffened fingers. Near me a grown man cried with the pain of a finger-nail torn from the flesh. We rested a moment before bending anew to the task.

"Handy now, laads!" the Second Mate at the bunt was roaring down the wind. "Stick t' it, ma herts . . . hold aal, now! . . . Damn ye, hold it, you. Ye haandless sojer! . . . Up, m' sons; up an' hold aal."

Cursing the stubborn folds, swaying dizzily on the slippery footropes, shouting for hold and gasket, we fought the struggling wind-possessed monster, and again the leach was passed along the yard. A turn of the gasket would have held it, but even the leading hands at the bunt were as weak and breathless as ourselves. The squall caught at an open lug, and again the sail bellied out, thrashing fiendishly over the yard.

There was a low but distinct cry, "Oh, God!" from the quarter, and M'Innes, clutching wildly, passed into the blackness below.

For a moment all hands clung desperately to the jackstay, fending the thrashing sail with bent heads; then some of the bolder spirits made to come off the yard . . . "The starboard boat . . . Who? . . . Duncan . . . It's Duncan gone . . . Quick there, the star . . . the lashings!"

The Second Mate checked their movement.

"No! No! Back, ye fools! Back, I say! Man canna' help Duncan now!"

He stood on the truss of the yard, grasping the stay, and swung his heavy sea-boot menacingly.

"Back, I say! Back, an' furl the sail . . . if ye wouldna' follow Duncan!"

Slowly we laid out the yard again, and set sullenly to master Duncan's murderer.

A lull came. We clutched and pounded at the board-like cloths, dug with hooked fingers to make a crease for handhold, and at last turned the sail to the yard, though lubberly and ill-furled.

One by one, as our bit was secured, we straggled down the rigging.

Some of the hands were aft on the lee side of the poop, staring into the darkness astern—where Duncan was. Munro, utterly unmanned, was crying hysterically. In his father's country manse, he had known nothing more bitter than the death of a favourite collie. Now he was at sea, and by his side a man muttered, "Dead?—My God, I *hope* he's dead . . . out there!"

The Old Man crossed over from the weather side, and addressing the men, said: "The Second Mate tells me ye wanted t' get t' th'

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boat when M'Innes . . . went . . . I'm pleased that ye've that much guts in ye, but I could risk no boat's crew in a sea like this . . . Besides, I'm more-ally certain that M'Innes was dead before he took the water. Eh, Mister ? "

" Aye . . . dead," said the Mate. " I saw him strike the to'gal'nt rail, and no man could live after a blow like that. Dead, sure ! "

Old Jock returned to his post under the weather-cloth, and the Mate ordered the watch below.

So Duncan took his discharge, and a few days later, in clearing weather, his few belongings were sold at the mast. It was known that he wasn't married, but Welsh John, who knew him best, said he had spoken of his mother in Skye ; and the Old Man kept a few letters and his watch that he might have something besides his money to send to Duncan's relatives.

As if Duncan had paid our toll for rounding the storm-scarred Cape, the weather cleared and winds set fair to us after that last dread night of storm. Under a press of canvas we put her head to the norrard, and soon left the Horn and the " Roaring Forties " astern.

* * *

LOVE SONG

Lovelier than Autumn leaves,
their beauty increased by memory,
or eyes that turn from grief is she.

Or winter holly red and dark on snow,
or the brief moon in the night sky :

or the bright first blossoming
of Spring flowers in dusty rooms,
or the sensual agony of dreams,
yet lustrous and still as a cut rose.

But especially is she
like the white lilac and green lavender,
lady of the undying year,
my altering love and my unchanged delight.

JOHN BAYLISS

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TRAVELLER'S TALE

Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live

EDWARD LEAR

We got to Babylon at nightfall and settled in the German rest house, to a supper of Bovril and sandwiches and an entertainment after from the small village boys who sang and danced: "Oh, Father of the railway, curses upon you who carry my love so swiftly away" or: "Her beauty shines as far as Basra and Baghdad and Damascus and turns the Moslems into Unbelievers": or "She thinks that I love her as she stands by the sideboard and combs her hair . . . but she is quite mistaken," the little wizard of a boy wagging his whole body as he danced and snapped his fingers with an expression of astonishing wickedness.

FREYA STARK, *Beyond Euphrates*

Equatorial

That was the Africa we knew,
Where, wandering alone,
We saw, heraldic in the heat,
A scorpion on a stone.

WILLIAM PLOMER

Oriental

Lord Macartney, destined to be England's first ambassador to China . . . was one of that long line of Irish gentlemen who have adorned and brightened the British administration . . . He was given a distinguished staff: Sir George Staunton, Bart., his friend and a well-known public servant, was appointed his Deputy, and he was accompanied by a number of artists and men of science. The *Lion*, a 64-gun man-of-war, attended by two merchantmen, was to carry him. No less than £13,124 was spent on presents for the Emperor, articles of a kind believed to be most acceptable in China, such as telescopes, lenses, guns and swords, globes, clocks and lustres, a planetarium and an orrery . . .

As soon as the arrival of the *Lion* at the bar of Taku was signalled, two Mandarins of the second and third rank, whose family names were Van and Chou, came on board. They had been placed on special duty by the Emperor to bring up the Embassy. Macartney was quite overwhelmed by his welcome. Van, who belonged to the military department, was a hearty, good-natured man, very

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obliging. Chou was a scholar, had been an Imperial Tutor, and was grave, solid and careful. Their manners were perfect . . .

As they went up the river Macartney noted that the flag in his houseboat bore an inscription. On enquiry he learnt that it read, "Tribute-embassy from Red Barbarians."

MAURICE COLLIS, *The Great Within*

Arabian Noon

Far are the shades of Arabia
Where the Princes ride at noon
'Mid the verdurous vales and thickets,
Under the ghost of the moon ;
And so dark is that vaulted purple,
Flowers in the forest rise
And toss into blossom 'gainst the phantom stars
Pale in the noonday skies . . .

They haunt me—her lutes and her forests ;
No beauty on earth I see
But shadowed with that dream recalls
Her loveliness to me :
Still eyes look coldly upon me,
Cold voices whisper and say—
" He is crazed with the spell of Arabia,
They have stolen his wits away."

WALTER DE LA MARE, from *Arabia*

Robinson Crusoe and Partners

He caught and tamed, after much exertion and patient perseverance, some of the cats that ran wild on the island. He amused himself by teaching them to dance, and to do a number of antic feats . . .

The island abounds in goats, which he shot while his powder lasted, and afterwards caught by speed of foot. The young he carried to the green lawn beside his hut, and employed his leisure hours in taming them. They in time supplied him with milk, and even with amusement, for he taught them as well as his cats to dance ; and he often afterwards declared, that he never danced with a lighter heart or greater spirit anywhere to the best of music than he did to the sound of his own voice with his dumb companions.

JOHN HOWELL, 1788–1863, *The Life of Alexander Selkirk*

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Chinoiserie

You who return from far Cathay
By the Messageries
Still enchanted and astray
From their opium and teas

In the eternal clair-obscur
Of an opalescent palace
Did you see Boudroulboudour
The Chinese princess?

Whiter in her black pantaloon
Than pearl beneath the shell?
Did Jean Chicaille, by light of the moon
Visit you as well,

Like the asphodels that mourn
In the isles of the Ouac-Wac
Vowing to seize his wife forsworn
And sew her in a sack,

Though like the wild peacock she
That when high sea-winds run
Gleams as it turns to flee
Into the rising sun?

PIERRE-JEAN TOULET, 1867–1920,
Translated by Cecily Mackworth

Bedside Manner, Belgrade

"It looked terrible," said my husband, "when I read in the papers before I had got your letter that you were ill in a hotel in Belgrade."

"I am sorry I tried to keep it from you," I said, "but after all I too had a shock when I read of my illness in the paper. For it said that I was in the care of two doctors: but there were three gentlemen coming in every day and baring my bosom and laying their heads against my heart, and I had hoped they were all members of the medical profession. On the whole I have never been more happily ill than I was here. When my temperature was very high and I really felt wretched, Angela and two other chambermaids and a waiter came and stood at the end of my bed and cried nearly the whole afternoon. Also my nurse cried a lot. I liked it enormously."

REBECCA WEST, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*

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THE PATRIARCH

Meh-Ping was not the first woman to take drastic measures to keep her husband at home

by JACQUES M. MAY

THE day Michelot walked into my office Robertson's death had been almost completely forgotten. There were several reasons for that: his business had been outside the town, he had died two years ago at sea about the time of my arrival in Siam—and he had lived with a native woman. I was therefore unprepared for the drama or the farce on which the curtain rose that morning.

It was only two weeks since I had last seen him, but now Michelot was hardly recognizable.

He was that sort of carefree devil whom you could not imagine being in trouble, far less being sick. He was a tall, lean, red-haired, blue-eyed Frenchman with a large lipless mouth seeming to coil and creep like a snake when he smiled. Topping that, and dividing it in two, was a long fleshy nose. On the whole, very much a horse face, but of a young amiable sort of horse. His weakness was women; there could not be the slightest doubt about that. At a party he would drink fruit juice or Coca-Cola or water. No cocktails for him, for his motto was: "*Homme de vin, homme de rien,*" which, he volunteered, was the view held by sixty generations of Auvergnate women, his kind.

By trade he was an agent for an oil company drawing a fixed salary plus commission. A cushy job in Siam, where there were no roads and all business was done in town. I understand he had held similar appointments in India and Africa. His ambition was to go to China.

When I asked him why he wanted to end his career there he was glad to explain:

"When I was in Africa my wife was a beautiful girl of Senegal. She was really darker than ebony. Pitch-black, you know, but kind and good. I stayed there six years during which she mothered me three daughters: Marguerite, Rose, and Liliane. Then I went to India, where I married a Tamil woman who, in turn, begot my darling Josephine, my sweet Jacqueline, and my beloved Marcelline. They have light amber skins and their eyes are like pools of bottom-

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less waters. I am now happily wed to Meh-Ping and you have, Doctor, brought into the world three weeks ago adorable Henriette, the junior sister of Georgette, who was born a year ago—one year after my arrival in this town.

"As soon as my third Siamese daughter is born I must rush to China to complete my round dozen of daughters with three Chinese babies. I am getting old and I dare not think of my future if the lucky spell which has made me so far the father of eight varied-hued beauties were to break. I just couldn't face it, my life would be meaningless. You really don't imagine that I live for selling petrol do you ? I feel that, unless I fulfil the dream of having a dozen daughters, three African, three Indian, three Siamese, and three Chinese, something imperfect and unfinished will give me an acrid taste in the mouth for the rest of my years."

Then his face, hitherto dead serious, lit up.

"Do you realize what they will say in the little French village, my birthplace, when I go there to retire, a few years hence ! Can you fancy my glory, sipping my Bock at the *Café du Commerce* enthroned amid my twelve devoted daughters ! "

He was so pleased at the thought that his smile extended to his ears.

Of course, nobody knew whether the story was true, partly true, or completely false. All I could say was that I had indeed delivered Meh-Ping of a beautiful baby girl three weeks ago and that Georgette was stumbling on her tiny feet all over the place each time I went to visit him at his house. Also, he had shown me real photographs of other little girls who he said were being educated in convents, some in Africa, some in India, towards the day of the family gathering at the *Café du Commerce*.

In those days it was an easy thing in Siam to find a lady companion. There was even a regular tariff and something like an established market. If you insisted on purchasing what was called a regular virgin it set you back four hundred *ticals*, which were given as a dowry either to herself or to her mother. Furthermore you were supposed to promise a monthly allowance of thirty to sixty *ticals* according to the beauty of the would-be bride.

If you were content with what was called an ordinary virgin it cost you only two hundred *ticals*, but the monthly allowance was the same. The difference was understood to be that a regular virgin had never had any sexual relations at all, whereas an ordinary virgin had had only such insignificant and casual sexual relations as may be expected in a nice average family between the people of the household.

Now if you were really short of cash and wanted to make a real bargain you could have a lady companion whose past was

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known, who had been the concubine of such or such bachelor recently gone home for good or moved to another place. This would cost you only eighty *ticals* and the regular monthly allowance. I had reason to believe that on his arrival at Bangkok Michelot had resorted to the last type of bargain. No chicken for him—he needed an experienced person.

But that morning Michelot looked like a man in trouble. I examined him very carefully and found a number of nervous symptoms which I did not know how to interpret. I ordered him to go to his house, stay in bed, and wait for me. I planned to make laboratory investigations of his blood and his spinal fluid.

When I went to see him he was definitely worse.

Meh-Ping was walking around his bed, dressed in the lovely *passing* of Siamese women, her soft arms naked to the pit, a rose at her throat, her dark hair and high cheekbones betraying the admixture of Chinese characteristics with the gentler Siamese. She was a beautiful woman of twenty-five, with full lips and sweet brown slanting eyes which could from time to time light up with powerful expression and meaning. She did not show in her figure and gait any trace of her three-weeks-old motherhood. During the time of my visit she didn't say a word, didn't smile, and busied herself with haughty indifference.

This was a bit unusual, and I managed to ask Michelot the reason for her attitude. He whispered into my ear that he had mentioned going to China within a year and that she had made a scene. But he did not seem to take it too seriously. His vast experience of women had taught him to take such things with a grain of salt. But then, was he in a condition to care for anything at all?

He lay in bed, white and limp, a vague smile on his sinuous mouth, seemingly deprived of will, strength, and inner light.

I was unable to make a diagnosis—asthenia, that's what it was, general weakness and exhaustion without, however, the sombre despair and the psychological symptoms that usually accompany the condition.

He took little food, only rice and fish which Meh-Ping fed him, for he was too weak even to lift the spoon. She sat in front of him, her striking, earnest, earthly beauty in sharp contrast to his smiling, disembodied frailty. She did not talk, not even in answer to the little jokes with which he tried to humour her. The dying man smiling, the moody wench brooding. There was something I could not understand.

When I reported the case to the old Mother Superior at the hospital, she said, "I wonder if you are going to let him die at

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his home, Doctor? Bring him in, I will have a room ready in an hour!"

"But he does not want to come, Mother, and there will be a row if I—"

"Bring him in quick, Doctor," she interrupted. "The girl he lives with—it's that girl Meh-Ping, isn't it? She used to be the wife of an Englishman who went home two years ago."

"I believe she was, Mother, although I don't know."

"But I know, I know!" She shook her head.

I suppose she did know. I was amazed how well informed the nuns were about everything going on in the town, even though they had not set foot outside the hospital for years. I decided to bring Michelot into the clinic. I knew the old woman must have something up her sleeve, although I was unable to guess what it was. Anyway I did as she said.

The next day Mother Superior went straight to the point.

"Ever heard of a man called Robertson, Doctor?"

"I don't think so, Mother. What's the matter with him?"

"Quite a lot," she said, "is the matter, because he is dead."

"And where does he come in, and what did he die of?"

"Nobody knows what he died of, but it happened on board ship when he was on his way home. He used to live in the jungle up north with another Englishman named McInturff. They were in the same business and when one left for England the other would take over for him. When Robertson was due to go on leave the girl he lived with forbade him to go. It was the usual story, probably she was afraid he would marry someone at home or something of that kind. She made a frightful scene, shouting that he would never see England again if he left her. McInturff suggested that he take Robertson's turn. Then it happened that McInturff's girl got mad, too, and the men were faced with women who managed to make their lives practically unbearable. Finally they decided this was too stupid for words and Robertson just went away without notice, leaving his girl alone in the bungalow. Before he reached Suez he was dead and they buried him at sea. McInturff, however, is still alive."

"This is a fantastic story, Mother, but I still can't see what it has to do with Michelot."

"More than you think, Doctor," was the answer. "Robertson's girl was Meh-Ping, the one who lives with Michelot."

Michelot was dying, there could be no doubt about that. What was still worse, he was dying without any apparent reason, without any diagnosis, and therefore without any real help.

My drugs went through him as through a sieve; there were

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really no symptoms—he just became weaker and weaker, refused to take food, refused to worry, refused to live.

His body participated in this ill-will strike. I got no response from my investigations—blood, urine, cerebro-spinal fluid—nothing that I could test was abnormal.

I decided I would not take such a beating without resistance and, although I could not quite bring myself to believe in the good Mother's more and more precise accusations, I set a dual course of action; I started a combined vitamin treatment, after putting him under an oxygen tent, and took a train to Chiengmai to see that fellow McInturff.

When I arrived he was at the station, easily recognizable because he was the only European there.

He was a tall man, strongly built, with a thick dark moustache, thinning dark hair, and shy grey eyes protected by horn-rimmed glasses. He was neatly dressed with unmistakable Bond Street elegance. His bony knees were sunburnt and his shorts were well creased. The bowl of a pipe protruded from the top of one of his socks. He had a spotless white shirt and a bow tie which seemed irrelevant in this sporty attire. He wore a brown felt hat which had nothing to do with northern Siam or the midday glare at Chiengmai.

We did not shake hands and I was struck by the very cold, almost hostile demeanour of the gentleman.

Cold? Hostile? Or—as I started wondering after a few exchanges—afraid?

"I am very grateful you managed to come to meet me, Mr. McInturff," I said. "I believe my errand is a matter of life or death for one of my patients. On the other hand, my coming here and asking you to waste a Sunday for me may be quite foolish."

He didn't respond to the friendly overture and the smile I had hoped was engaging. On the contrary, at my mention of a matter of life or death, I thought I noticed some kind of tremor on his frozen face.

I told him the facts as we walked towards the rest-house where we sat later, drinking the inevitable whisky and soda. When I had finished he called for the boy, and lunch was served. He had not yet given me any comment or any encouragement. As we ate I felt he was thawing a bit, and after a second helping of fried plantains he began in a pleasant, deep voice:

"Doctor, I am glad you came. What is more, I am glad this happened, because probably you can help me as much as—if not more than—I can help you. The matter to which you refer has been my constant worry ever since Robertson died. I have kept it to myself for want of anyone to whom I could talk. Besides,

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although I admit I live, unmarried, with a native woman, I don't like to speak about it." His words came out unevenly, as if he were wondering whether he should continue.

"This man," I thought, "has become dedicated to some obscure obsession and some overwhelming fear—he is really glad to air his feelings."

"Finally, I have no proof," he continued, "should I go to Bangkok even for a week, that I would or would not die in the same way as Robertson did. There is nobody here to whom I can tell the story, and your visit may well be a turning point in my life."

"How are things in your home?" I asked to encourage confidence.

"At the present time things are quite normal," he pursued. "The girl is laughing and happy and there is nothing to show the tense condition in which I live. When I told her of Robertson's death, two years ago, she just said, 'Yes, I know.' That's all."

During his confession, which he had started in a matter-of-fact tone, his voice had grown harsh. He was disclosing the depths of himself. A queer uncertain smile betrayed his desire for self-control, but fear was all over his contracted features.

"You see, I really don't know what to do. It is possible that the whole story is a farce and that poor Robertson died from natural causes; on the other hand, if he was the victim of some secret witchcraft"—he looked at me sheepishly to observe my reaction as he uttered the word—"or poison, it would not be wise for me to go to Bangkok."

"You certainly know, Doctor, about these native poisons given together with the antidote. The toxic drug accumulates in your body, checked by the antidote. The day you fail to take the antidote you die from the effects of the poison. Maybe that is what happened to Robertson—maybe that is what will happen to me. When I said I must meet you today at the train my girl looked at me and said: 'Don't come back too late!' Maybe she meant nothing more, but maybe she meant a deadly threat and I am . . . yes, I am afraid. This is something I can't fight. I don't think I am a coward, but I just can't bring myself to disobey her. I . . . am a prisoner and up to the time of your visit I saw no way of escape. I certainly believe you have good reason to be concerned for Meh-Ping's present lover. He is being poisoned, as maybe I am, or would be if I tried to run away."

We sat for a moment in silence and then I had to say good-bye. The time of my departure was now at hand and I rushed to the station.

Leaning through the window of the moving train, I could see

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McInturff's sagging body as he walked thoughtfully towards his little love nest.

The next day when I reached the hospital a pleasant surprise awaited me.

Michelot was better.

As I walked into his room he was eating his soup without the help of the sister on duty, who was just watching him from the foot of the bed. Needless to say, Meh-Ping had not been admitted to visit him at the hospital.

On the verandah the old Mother was waiting for me, a sparkle of triumph behind her lenses.

"See what three days outside his house have done for him, Doctor!"

"Yes, Mother, or perhaps the vitamins or the oxygen." But her expression indicated that, had she not been in holy orders, she would have answered, "Nonsense."

The problem, however, was mine. Within a few days I would have to decide whether I should allow Michelot to return home to his daily dish of poison.

He had already asked when he could go back to his family. I had evaded the question, and my trip north was no inducement to change my mind about that. But if his improvement continued a decision would have to be made sooner or later.

I was pondering this as I went through my morning routine. It was X-ray day. In the darkness of the room, absorbed by my exploration of the patients' organs, under the unreal fluoroscopic radiation, I was unconsciously weighing my problem, dimly hoping for inspiration.

Suddenly I knew. It might work!

The idea pleased me so much that all its moral and ethical implications were temporarily obscured. As usual they were to shine on my conscience later, in triumphant revenge.

I switched the light on, removed my heavy-leaded rubber gloves, and ordered, "Send my car to Mr. Michelot's house and bring his lady back here, right now."

"But, Doctor," the sister answered, "Mother Superior has forbidden that she set foot in the hospital."

"I know," I said. "I will settle this with her, but please do as I say."

I was quite sure that permission from the Mother Superior's office was sought secretly and granted, but soon I heard my car rushing along the gravel path in compliance with my orders.

I lit a dim bulb in the room and waited.

Would it work?

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After some forty minutes Meh-Ping, still haughty and reserved, walked into the X-ray room.

I was sure that thirty minutes ago she had been untidy, barefoot, and wearing old clothes, as many women do in their homes when the man is not around. Now she was exquisitely rouged, combed, and gowned, and, with the car waiting for her, had done the job in less than half an hour.

I feigned not to notice her presence and went on writing busily in the oppressive atmosphere of the room, dark except for the small desk lamp which shone dimly on my papers. The chromium frame of the X-ray machine, the complicated switchboard of the generator, the strange bulb, the silence, and the waiting added to the suspense and I could feel the girl fretting uneasily on her chair.

After a while I asked her casually to lay her hands on the X-ray table; then silently I moved the fluoroscope screen and switched the current. The X-ray bulb lit and my desk lamp automatically went out. Then slowly I opened the diaphragm and Meh-Ping's bones appeared on the greenish screen.

She leaned forward. When she saw the skeleton of her hands plainly visible, she uttered the most anguished scream I have ever heard. I thought I had gone a bit too far and had to think of Robertson, McInturff, and Michelot in quick succession to give me courage. At the same time I switched the X-ray off and ordered the light to be put on again.

The girl was deathly pale and on the verge of fainting. I patted her hands.

"Give her a glass of water," I said to the sister. She drank, and as the colour returned to her cheeks she looked at me with awe and sudden respect.

"You see, Meh-Ping, I can read your thoughts as easily as I can see your bones. I can do that even without the machine, and this machine can do much more than you think. Now here's what I have to say; Michelot will go back home and you will see that he is never, never sick any more, whatever happens, even should he decide to go away to France or to China. You will send a message at once to your friend at Chiengmai who lives with McInturff and you will tell her exactly what happened in this room and tell her that Mr. McInturff is under my protection, that he is leaving for England as soon as another man can come to take his place and that, should anything happen to him or to Michelot or to McInturff's successor, I will put the machine into action and you both will be sorry. As easily as you could reach Robertson at sea, I can reach you or McInturff's girl with this machine, anywhere you may go."

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She looked at her hands with a mixture of terror and delight. I believe she was grateful that I had been kind enough to restore them to their original living form and had not decided to let them remain as skeletons for the rest of her life.

I brought her to Michelot and discreetly left the room.

The next morning I went to the post office and cabled.

McInturff Esquire Chiengmai.
You may safely look for an assistant and make plans for a happy voyage to England.

Late that night, quite alone with my thoughts, I wondered what disturbed the satisfaction I ought to have felt at the success of my stratagem.

The terror in Meh-Ping's brown eyes was not a pleasant thing to remember, nor the feeling of absolute ascendancy which was mine against the utter dejection which was hers, nor the cheap trick from which I had borrowed my power, nor the unwelcome possibility that the look in Meh-Ping's eyes was that of helpless innocence and not of remorseful guilt.

To these uneasy feelings the imaginary picture of McInturff's relief was no compensation. Damn fool! . . .

★*Dr. Jacques May is one of the few surgeons in the world who has practised medicine on four continents, first in his native France, then in the Far East and, after the fall of France in* 1940, *in Africa. He has recently been practising surgery in New York. "The Patriarch" was drawn from his experiences as chief surgeon of the French hospital at Bangkok in Siam, where he was also physician to the Royal Palace.*

* * *

ON BALANCE

In his autobiography, James Gerard quotes the elder John Jacob Astor as saying to him:

"Actually, you know, a man with a million dollars is just as well off as if he were rich."

Said Scott Fitzgerald to Ernest Hemingway, "The very rich are different from us."

"Yes," said Hemingway, "they have more money."

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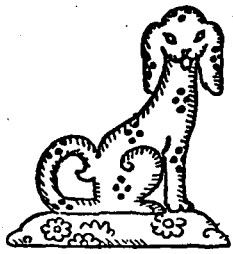

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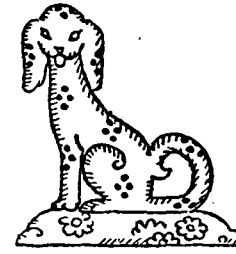

BELLEGARDE, penniless patrician as he was, was an insatiable collector, and his walls were covered with rusty arms and ancient panels and platters, his doorways draped in faded tapestries, his floors muffled in the skins of beasts. Here and there was one of those uncomfortable tributes to elegance in which the upholsterer's art, in France, is so prolific; a curtained recess with a sheet of looking-glass in which, among the shadows, you could see nothing; a divan on which, for its festoons and furbelows, you could not sit: a fireplace draped, flounced, and frilled to the complete exclusion of fire . . .

HENRY JAMES, *The American*

. . . *Aunt Ann, who now but seldom left the corner of her brother Timothy's green drawing-room, where, under the aegis of a plume of dyed pampas grass in a light blue vase, she sat all day reading and knitting, surrounded by the effigies of three generations of Forsytes . . .*

JOHN GALSWORTHY, *The Man Of Property*

THEN on quaint pedestals and Terminal Gods and gracious pilasters of every sort, were shell-like vases of excessive fruits and flowers that hung about and burst over the edges and could never be restrained. The orange trees and myrtles, looped with vermilion sashes, stood in frail porcelain pots and the rose-trees were wound and twisted with superb invention over trellis and standard.

AUBREY BEARDSLEY, *Under The Hill*

" I did not catch your remark, because
I was so entranced with that lovely vaws ! "

J. J. ROCHE

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★*Who is IRON CHEST, diamond thief who has baffled the police of Europe's capitals? Raiding a jeweller's shop at Tangier he escaped from SIR HENRY MERRIVALE, world-famous amateur detective, and COLONEL DUROC, head of the city's international police force. BILL BENTLEY, of the British Consulate, and his wife, PAULA, almost captured him. Next morning Paula, seeing diamonds and the sinister chest which gave the criminal his name at a flat advertised to let, went inside with COMMANDANT JUAN ALVAREZ, Duroc's right-hand man. Duroc followed, then MAUREEN HOLMES, Sir Henry's secretary. G. W. COLLIER, tenant of the flat, sneered while police searched and found nothing. Paula identified Collier as the diamond raider, Alvarez challenged him to fight, quarrelled with Duroc and resigned. Collier disappeared.*

Later Alvarez and Maureen found Sir Henry, disguised as a Holy Man, touring the Little Socco in a sedan chair, and manœuvred him into a tailor's shop. Collier, Sir Henry said, was an accomplice of the real Iron Chest, who had let him try the Tangier raid. From a gambling room behind the shop came ILONE, COUNTESS SCHERBATSKY, and MARK HAMMOND, American writer, who revealed Collier's record as a boxer. Collier suddenly appeared. Alvarez pursued him and was knocked out.

The Third Part of

BEHIND THE CRIMSON BLIND

by CARTER DICKSON

AT half-past seven that evening, Paula Bentley lay back motionless and soaking in a very hot bath.

The bathroom of their quarters at the Minzah Hotel was not large. Bill Bentley, in grey flannels and a short-sleeved shirt tucked in at the collar, stood at the wash basin with his back to her.

Bill was shaving with an electric razor. It might have been the cosiest of domestic scenes, a young couple preparing to dress for dinner, except for one thing . . . Round Bill's left shoulder and side was strapped the yellowish-brown leather of a shoulder holster. In the holster he carried a Webley .45 revolver.

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Yet neither she nor Bill referred to her danger in the slightest way. They spoke lightly and casually, on all other subjects. The electric razor continued to hum softly in the steamy bathroom. Then Bill, with a new idea, shut it off.

"Baggage," he said.

"M'm?" Paula spoke drowsily, without opening her eyes.

"Going from great conceptions to small things," said Bill, contemplating the razor, "did I ever tell you how my old man first set me up in life . . .?"

"Yes, darling." Paula, being a wise wife, did not add, "About a thousand times." She went on, "As an electrical engineer. But you hated that, and tried to study painting. You could do still life, but your figures were dreadful." Paula kept the same drowsy tone. "I'm rather glad of that. If you'd ever had a model, I should have scratched her eyes out."

"Painters don't think like that!" objected Bill, and cleaned the mirror with his arm so that he could see her face to face. He craned his neck up and sideways. "All the same, you give me ideas."

"Do you think *I* don't have them?" inquired Paula, half opening her eyes. "But, darling! This isn't the time or place. Especially considering that . . ."

Outside, in the bedroom, they could hear the telephone ring. Colonel Duroc, who had been pacing up and down, waiting for it, answered: "Allo?"

Bill, with his big hands shaking despite himself, dried his face and flung away the towel. Keeping his back carefully towards Paula, he slipped the Webley .45 out of the holster, opened it as quietly as he could, saw that it was fully loaded in every chamber, softly clicked the barrel back again, and returned it to the holster. He had done this about twenty times already.

Paula slipped out of the tub and, not troubling to dry herself, seized from the opposite wall a long-sleeved robe of heavy towel material, which she wrapped around her. Bill had unlocked the door when she reached it. Both of them slid sideways, together, into the bedroom.

Though outside it was not yet dark, the shutters and curtains had been drawn and lights shone in the soft-carpeted room with its blue hangings. The telephone was on its small table at the head of the double bed; Colonel Duroc, in uniform, sat on the far edge of the bed while he spoke to the 'phone in Spanish.

"Good, good!" said the Colonel. "Continue."

There was a rasping sound from the receiver. The back of Colonel Duroc's neck turned pink with joy. "Better, better!" he said. "But why do you say you have 'probably' trapped him? Have your men stop every bolt hole. If he tries to make a run for it, then shoot. But do not shoot to kill unless you must. I want him as a witness."

Again the voice rasped. Paula and Bill, who could not hear a word from the other side, were growing frantic with curiosity. Duroc moistened his lips. Then, after a pause, he said, "Very well. But

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you cannot have more men, because *I* lead a party to surround the—you understand?—40-bis Marshan when the real Iron Chest strikes for the diamonds. *This* party cannot leave the hotel until it is well and deeply dark. This party will be commanded by Sir—to you—the Lord Merrivale."

Hesitantly the Colonel put back the 'phone on its cradle. Through his brain went every aspect of this case. When H.M. had explained the "miracles" of Iron Chest, the Colonel had then swiftly and logically deduced Iron Chest's identity. He was very proud of this. But then there had come H.M.'s telephone tip from the Kasbah, where the latter sinner was on the loose in the same sedan chair as that of his morning's carousal; and Duroc must set moving the organization.

Finally, there had been H.M.'s final message about the adventures in the tailor's shop. The Colonel, in person, had raced down in his jeep to convey Alvarez to Dr. McPhail's nursing home. He had hovered while the calm doctor quieted Maureen's hysterics, finally with sedatives. He had interviewed the Countess Scherbatsky at her house in the Place du Kasbah. He had spoken with Mark Hammond, who was having dinner at the Parade. And the Colonel knew, if H.M. did not, that at one o'clock Collier had shouldered his chunky frame into an all-day-open ironmonger's in the Grand Socco. There he had bought a knife with a blade sharpened to razor-edge on either side.

"Monsieur wishes," had stammered the Arab proprietress, in an amiable attempt at French, "to kill animals?"

"No," had said Collier, in bad but understandable French. "I wish to cut the throat of a blonde."

For fully five minutes, after he had slammed the door, the proprietress had giggled over this as a good joke. Then, suddenly, she had fled screaming into the street to find a policeman.

Now Colonel Duroc, sitting on the edge of the bed, made up his mind. He could feel two pairs of eyes, those of Paula and Bill, boring into his back.

"Ha, ha," he carolled with mirth. Strutting over to a deep padded blue chair, he sat down, his shoulders heaving with chuckles, and faced the Bentleys.

"It's—it's not really very funny," said Paula, in the long trailing robe which actually belonged to Bill. "You told us that would be Acting Commandant Somebody. What did he say?"

Colonel Duroc puffed out his lips.

"A trifle," he replied airily, in his excellent English. "Come! It can wait for a moment or two."

Whereupon he frowned with mock sternness, and shook his finger at Paula. "By burn!" he said. "I ask myself, again and again, why this young lady can never appear in public without wearing the least possible clothes."

"But I—I never think of it!" Paula protested.

"It is I who tell you. I, Papa Duroc. And it is not what *you* think. It is what all young men think; yes, and old ones too!"

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The Colonel pointed his finger at Paula, like a mighty sorcerer commanding a miracle.

"Be dressed!" he said.

The miracle was not instantaneous, of course. Paula scurried about the room with the long robe flapping about her feet. She opened cupboard doors and shut them, gathering clothes, then hurried into the bathroom. But at the door she turned for a final word.

"Blast you," Paula observed mildly. The door slammed and was locked—or apparently so.

"Now let's have it," Bill said in a low voice. "Everything you heard on that 'phone."

Duroc told him. He omitted no word which Acting Commandant Perez had said.

Collier, it seemed, had been traced to the house of a carpet and antique dealer named Ali. In the cellar of this great Arab house was his shop. The whole, apparently, was a honeycomb of galleries, little rooms, and bolt holes, making it an enviable hiding place. There was even a dummy window, of which the Acting Commandant had hinted that he knew the secret. Duroc had instructed that the house be surrounded and men stationed at every bolt hole, but, as they had no means, such as tear gas, of smoking out Collier—here, Duroc's voice sank apologetically—Perez had suggested that they use Paula as a decoy, since Collier had bragged openly that he would kill her at the first opportunity. "And so," the Colonel ended hastily, "if your good wife will assist?"

Still Bill Bentley remained motionless.

"I won't let you do it," he said quietly.

Duroc lifted his shoulders. "If you refuse, it is finished."

"Look here," muttered Bill. "I admit—well, I enjoy any tom-fool stunt myself. But, when it comes to involving Paula . . ."

"You know that this Collier has named your wife. You know his threats to her; he is filth; he will keep the promise if he can. Yet now we have him trapped in a single big house; we are certain. It may be our only chance. Do you care to go with her, perhaps for months, holding a pistol, forever looking round for a blow which may—or, by burn!—or may not come?"

Bill hesitated, looking away and licking dry lips.

Now Colonel Duroc, a kindly man, hated what he had to say. But discipline held him like a harness.

"You are big enough," he challenged. "With your arm round her, and a loaded gun in your other hand, dare you not face one man?"

The Colonel had said a thing you must not say to any man, let alone Bill. The colour receded from Bill's face. His eyes narrowed, and his heavy left fist darted back.

"All right," he said. "I'll do it."

And, once having made that promise, Bill would walk forward in a dead straight line, not deviating one inch if he walked against enemy tanks.

"Mind," he said without much voice, "I said *I'd* do it. It's Paula's choice, remember. I warn you. I'm going to advise her

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against it ; I mean to use every argument against it ; and if I have any influ . . ."

Suddenly the door of the bathroom, which all this time had stood open a splinter's width, was flung wide open.

Paula had not progressed far with her dressing. Round the corner of the door she thrust out her head ; and, to the regret of Papa Duroc, her shoulders as well.

" Of course I'll do it ! " she cried. " D-don't be silly ! "

The door slammed, and this time was genuinely locked.

Colonel Duroc, by this time much upset and wishing he hadn't mentioned the matter, sat down slowly.

" I love that girl," he said simply.

" Not bad, is she ? " muttered Bill. There was another long pause before Bill added bitterly : " Anyway, in what she'll do for—people. And never say a word." He sat down and put his head in his hands. " But he won't hurt her. By God, he won't."

Colonel Duroc swung round and Bill leaped to his feet as there was a knocking at the door to the hotel corridor.

" *ENTREZ !* " called Duroc, clearing his throat.

It was, at first glance, only Sir Henry Merrivale. Gone were the robe, the moustache and mighty beard, the walnut-juice stains, the green tarbush of the Prophet Hassan-el-Mulik. But H.M. remained crafty. Having nicked an old-fashioned square Churchillian bowler hat from the tailor's, he had jammed it on and refused to remove it. His black alpaca suit fitted the occasion, if not him. An unlighted cigar was stuck in the corner of his mouth.

" Cor ! " he remarked. " If any livin' son of Esau had as tiring a day as I've had—"

Colonel Duroc straightened up.

" *You* have had a tiring day ? " he inquired. " Ha, ha. Behold, may I goose a duck ! What about Papa Duroc ? " A terrible thought struck him. " You are not still in that sedan chair ? "

" Son, I wouldn't stir a step in this loony city without it ! She's downstairs."

" She must go. For tonight you cannot use her—it, I tell you."

H.M. merely looked mulish and stuck out his chin.

" For the morning," declared Colonel Duroc, " all this morning, you gave me hot-and-cold fits by your carousal about this place in a sedan chair. Later I hear of your disguise, which is worse yet and did not deceive me . . ."

" Ho, didn't it fool everybody ? " shouted H.M., not without reason. " I got in my best innings, before noon and after, in the Kasbah. That's where . . ."

" But how," persisted the Colonel, clutching at his tie, " could you deceive the Arabs ? You cannot even speak their language ! "

" Oh, son," H.M. said dismally, " that was the easiest part of all. Y'see, I've really read the Koran. In English, yes. But I've even studied it. And for some rummy reason," he hammered his

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head, scowling, " whatever goes into this onion always sticks there."

" But the language . . ."

" I'm telling you. I'd got a noble disguise, d'ye see, from the costume shop beside Bernstein and Company. It included a simon-pure authentic robe, which I didn't change until I bought another from Ali, the carpet dealer."

Here his little eyes grew sharp, but Colonel Duroc said nothing for the moment.

" So, when I was moochin' about in my sedân chair, just whistling for information, I didn't need any Arabic. Oh, except ' Peace be upon your house.' Then I'd speak in not-too-perfect English or French, which they understood. I said I was goin' out to preach in the infidel world."

Bill Bentley, standing against a cupboard door, spoke seriously.

" You know," he said, " you really *are* a crafty old swine."

" Thank'ee, son," said the gratified H.M.

" Pah ! " sneered the Colonel. " It was pure luck, then, that you spot what you call to me the ' snaky little type,' Ali, in the Kasbah ? "

" Luck, hey ? " demanded H.M., turning slightly purple. " It was no more'n routine police work. I mooched about, just like an ordinary copper . . ."

" I also am much about." The Colonel was withering. " Pah ! You cannot speak your own language."

" But when it came to Ali," persisted H.M., " it was something else. I sort of hinted that to Alvarez and Maureen Holmes this afternoon. I knew he was a soul mate of mine . . ."

" *Un—quoi ?* "

" Sure. I said soul mate. He knew, and I knew, we were both as twisty and crooked as each other. When he kept saying, in that bat's squeak, ' In Tangier one may buy all things,' down to a purr, ' at a price,' well, I tested him.

" I asked him, for instance, if he could get me a forged passport. That was so easy the little feller only giggled with his teeth. Then I said, what about a good revolver. He asked me whether I'd like a ' fine Colt's Banker's Special, three-eight, with much ammo, at a price.' "

" But here is the pistol," said Colonel Duroc, " which Collier has used when he impersonates the true Iron Chest at Bernstein et Cie.'s attempted robbery ! "

" Uh-huh. Couldn't you sort of sense Collier lurkin' about ? "

" *Eh bien, alors ?* "

" *Eh bien,*" said the Old Maestro, making a fiendish face, " I bowled the little feller, Ali, a mean one. I asked whether he could get me a lot of some mildish high-explosive like dynamite or T.N.T. That nearly snookered him. But you couldn't beat him. He went away for a conference, 'cause he said there'd been a recent call for it—as though it'd been cough medicine. But up he squeaked : ' Two, t'ree day ? Yes ? At a price ? ' " H.M. broke off suddenly, and glared at Bill over his spectacles. " What's so rummy about this, son ? "

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" To mention nothing else," said Bill, " didn't he think you were one hell of a holy man ? "

" Oh, son ! He knew I was crooked. Or we couldn't have got so pally, or drunk mint tea, or . . . Haah ! Stop a bit ! There's something I've *got* to know, now ! "

Colonel Duroc looked his consternation.

" My dear friend, but of course ! What puzzles you ? "

" It's this stuff called *keef*. I heard about it at Ali's. I even heard that old witch Scherbatsky talking about *keef* parties. I think you smoke it. But what in the name of Esau is *keef* ? "

" *Keef*," the Colonel explained patiently, " is a species of tobacco somewhat like marihuana, but much more mild and never with dangerous results. The Arabs . . ."

" Moors ! " said H.M., pointing a stern finger in his face.

" Tut, tut ! Always I forget. Yes, yes, *Moors*. Well, these Arabs, who are pious Moslems and do not drink, smoke *keef* instead. I repeat : its earlier effects," he raised the tufted eyebrows significantly, " are pleasant. Afterwards the Arab or other simply goes to sleep, with more pleasant dreams. Never does it make him run amok or have any ill consequences."

H.M. thrust forward a ghoulish and eager face.

" Looky here, Colonel. Could you get me some ? "

Colonel Duroc seemed mildly shocked.

" But you do not wish to smoke *keef* ! "

" Ho ! Don't I ! "

" Well, if you must have it," sighed the Colonel, " I suppose you had better have the best quality. I will make a note of it. *Keef* for Sir Henry. Now ! To our affairs, yes ? What else have you to tell ? "

But H.M.'s mood had altered.

" Oh, no," he said sharply, " I've told you everything, supplementing the whole lot I said on the 'phone. Something tells me," he sniffed like an ogre, " you've got another message, and my tip about the carpet dealer was right. If so, let's hear it ! "

For the second time Colonel Duroc carefully repeated every word which Acting Commandant Perez had said.

" I see," H.M. grunted finally. " You think it may be less dangerous if the—" He paused, and Colonel Duroc nodded.

" Then you're leading the raid against 40-bis Marshan." He looked doubtful. " Y'know, I rather doubt there'll be an attack, even if the Greek helps," he went on cryptically. " And with that witch of a Scherbatsky talking all over the place . . ."

" Then what else can I do ? "

" Nothing, I suppose," admitted H.M. " 'Cause you can't afford to let it slip past." He brooded. " Who's leading our crowd into the Kasbah ? "

" You are."

" Oh, stick-a-pig ! " groaned H.M., and shut his eyes. He opened them again. " Looky here, son. I could take some people in. But I'd bring 'em up two miles on the other side of Fez. *I can't do it, Colonel.* What you need . . ."

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There was another sharp knock at the door, and another lightning draw from Bill's holster. The man who entered from the corridor door was Juan Alvarez.

ALVAREZ was a little pale under his faint swarthiness, very straight in his well-cut double-breasted suit of dark grey. There was only a small dressing at the back of his head, though Dr. MacPhail would have had fits at the soft hat he had pulled tightly over it.

Bill and he showed real pleasure at the meeting by giving each other a hard punch at each other's shoulder.

"I thought you were in the nursing home," muttered Bill, out of the corner of his mouth. "What's the game?"

"Slipped out," muttered Alvarez, also out of the corner of his mouth. "Had to see the old man." A brief nod flickered towards Colonel Duroc. "Back me up, whatever I say."

"Right."

Alvarez, again fighting-fit and brisk of step, approached the Commissioner of Police.

"Sir," he said. "According to my promise," his eye moved briefly towards H.M., who was smoking furiously, "and according to my own wish, I desire to apologize. My conduct in getting drunk was so indefensible that, if it had not been for your generous hesitation, I should have been discharged on the spot."

"Hurrum!" growled the Colonel, with his bright blue eyes fixed on a corner of the ceiling.

"As for my conduct today, it was even more unpardonable." Now this was not strictly true. But to Duroc, who knew he had lost his head and was in the wrong, this was healing and soothing; it mollified. "I said and did impossible things, which—er—only your generosity permitted me to save face by my resignation. I think, sir, that is all."

"Well, nobody could apologize better than that," declared Bill, to the room in general.

"*Ah, zut!*" exploded Colonel Duroc.

He bounced to his feet, hurling his notebook on the floor.

"Let's go take a glass!" he shouted, heaving all over with chuckles. He wrung Alvarez's out-thrust hand, and with his other hand Colonel Duroc pointed dramatically at the telephone. "Come, it is necessary that we command the champagne!"

From his pocket he took a folded square of paper which could be only the former Commandant's resignation. Tearing it into small pieces, he threw them wide. "And there!" he added.

It was Alvarez, bowing, who restored the conversation to English and to some degree of sanity.

"If you will forgive me, sir, I do not know whether we may yet tear it up."

Colonel Duroc stiffened.

"You see, sir, I have every hope that I can persuade Miss Maureen Holmes to become my wife. She may not wish to remain

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in Tangier. But if she remains, as I think she will, then let the resignation be torn up."

"Commandant!" beamed the Colonel. "Then you will marry the little Madame Bentley? Commandant I congrat . . ."

"Here, stop a bit!" protested Bill.

"Ah, but I forget!" cried the Colonel, with a strange look as he clutched at his face. "The different lady, but also nice! I love her!" Quite suddenly, as though by a miracle, Colonel Duroc's wits seemed to flash back. "Commandant Alvarez! Why are you here tonight?"

"Well, sir, I telephoned the central station, and they were good enough to put me in touch with Perez . . ."

"Why do you come here? What do you want?"

"I want," said Alvarez, "to command this particular party, if only for tonight. I would not interfere with Perez, who is a good man. But I want to guide your friends. I know every foot of the Kasbah. I know the great whitewashed room, underground at the carpet-dealer's, and every entrance to it. In short, I want to bring you Collier on a plate."

Again Duroc's eyes narrowed under the tufted brows.

"You would capture Collier, true. But first you would wish to smash him in pieces with your fists. Is it not so?"

"Yes, sir!" replied Alvarez. "Knowing about him what you know now, do you blame me?"

"On consideration, no. Well! Perhaps this is better than having him slashed to pieces with bullets from automatic rifles, which are but modified machine-guns. Do as you like, Commandant. Here is my hand and promise."

"Thank you, sir."

Just then the telephone rang. Colonel Duroc snatched it up.

"*Allo?* Perez? . . . What? No, no, be off the line! . . . What?" His angry gaze moved to Alvarez. "For you," he added, and held out the 'phone.

"Thank you, sir . . . Yes?" said Alvarez in a tense voice.

"This is Mark Hammond," replied the voice. "I've been thinking over what I told you today about Collier as a fighter, and since then I've looked up his record for myself. The police station said you'd probably be at the Minzah. Are you still interested?"

"Even more so!"

Hammond's voice, though not loud, was so clear that every person in the room could hear each word.

"I told you he's far past his prime, and slow," continued Hammond. "But there was one thing I forgot. According to my information, he hasn't even had the gloves on for years. He'll be sluggish, slow of reaction in mind and body, and his timing will be all off."

Paula, in yellow sweater, black slacks, and a woolly tan coat pulled over her shoulders, crept softly from the bathroom.

"Don't carry a handbag," Bill whispered in her ear. "Stick anything you want in your coat pockets. Sh-h. I want to hear this!"

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"Any tips you can give me from the record?" asked Alvarez.

"Yes, one or two," replied the small, clear voice. "He holds his right hand—that's the killer hand—too low; and he's a sucker for a left hook." As Hammond spoke, all of them saw the Commandant's teeth gleam. "You can give him any body punch without troubling him, except one: a belly punch just above the waistline. He can't take too much punishment there; it cost him five fights. You may, I say *may*, have a chance against him. But remember: he keeps his left high, to guard against a right cross; he'll never forget his ringcraft; and he's a heavy puncher. Good night, good luck."

"Good night, thanks," replied Alvarez, and put down the 'phone.

Almost instantly the 'phone rang again.

"That is for me," Duroc declared, and he was right. After thirty seconds he put down the 'phone, and stood up straight, rather pale.

"Collier is trapped," he said. "They have stopped up every bolt hole. Collier is inside the house. Commandant!"

"Sir?"

"Forget *la boxe*. Never mind *la boxe*. Can you give me Collier?"

"Yes, sir," said Alvarez, so hoarsely that he had to clear his throat.

"With trimmings on," muttered Bill.

"Good! And the little lady, she is ready. I follow you down into the foyer. Good luck."

Alvarez smiled and patted Paula on the back as he and Bill closed in on each side of her. H.M., in his Churchillian bowler, turned off the lights. Colonel Duroc opened the door.

Now it was Collier—or nothing.

UPWARDS they mounted, on the very high but shallow flight of stone stairs, enclosed at a fairly wide distance by dirty white walls. Under the arch far below, the lights and rattle of the Little Socco dwindled away. Down on them pressed the secrecy and dimness of the Kasbah.

Paula walked in the middle, with Alvarez on her left side and Bill close on her right. Though Alvarez seemed to carry no weapon, under the side of his waistcoat, hidden vertically with loop down, rested the murderous rubber truncheon. At the reception desk of the hotel, too, he had picked up a smallish grey canvas bag, which he now swung in his left hand.

Sir Henry Merrivale, complaining bitterly of his feet, lumbered after them as rearguard.

"But why must we go in on this side?" Paula whispered. "Do you know, in nearly five years Bill has never allowed me to go into the Kasbah at night. And this carpet dealer's must be far away on the other side, Bill . . ."

"You see, Mrs. Bentley," Alvarez explained in a low voice, "admittedly I take you by a very long way round. But we must not meet the police party bang in front of the shop."

They emerged into a fairly open flat space where dim little alleys

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seemed to pierce through tall brownish or whitish house walls.

Paula, fascinated, was now looking to the right on so twisted a street that you could not tell whether it ran up or down hill. Its darkness was lightened at only one shiny blur on the pavement. One door, in a pair of double doors, stood open so that they saw it sideways. The upper part of the door had a frosted-glass panel which, feebly illuminated, showed red lettering—in English, strangely enough—with the legend: "Satan's Hotel."

"Oh, my dolly!" said H.M. dismally. "Don't bother with it. It looks very fetchin', but it's not."

"No more talking, please," hissed Alvarez. "Be quiet as I lead you."

They went down a long, humped, narrow street, inside high dirty white walls, then turned into another and still another. Often Alvarez had to use an electric torch. Sometimes, at sharp corners there would be a light, hidden in the arch of an old red-brown-white Moorish tower, so dim that it seemed yellow.

"Y'know," suddenly observed H.M., who had been brooding over Satan's Hotel, "there are a lot of those hotels that can be used for proper ordinary hotels. I knew a feller once who went to one and left his luggage. But he stayed out too late with some friends. When he got back, burn me if the proprietor hadn't slung out his luggage and re-let the room to a gal for business purposes. Being a bloke of decency and feelin', he couldn't intrude. Now could he?"

"S-ss-t!"

"Uh-huh. Suit yourself."

With Bill's right hand on the grip of the Webley as he pressed against her on one side, and Alvarez's right hand near the loop of the truncheon as he moved close on the other side, anyone who flew at Paula from in front would shortly be sausage meat. She knew this, and loved it. Yet at every step she grew more frightened.

Then, from behind a sealed door in a low white wall whose crenellated top showed like battlements against the sky, Paula heard music—of a sort. It had strings, pipes, and some rattling sound, in which you could make out a rhythm. It seemed to whirl faster and faster to what seemed a heavy stamping of many feet.

"Isn't that," Paula asked, glad of the darkness for a moment, "one of those places where Arab girls dance naked on a table with the weirdest possible contortions of . . . of anatomy?"

"Yes," Bill growled in her ear. "*You* don't want to go in there, do you?"

"We-ell," murmured Paula, in the tone of one who means, "I shouldn't really mind."

"Baggage," said Bill, "you never told me you wanted to . . ."

"Please, we must go on," Alvarez insisted tensely, and again glanced at his watch. "We are losing time. We must hurry!"

Again the march went on, more quickly. Presently Paula more than guessed, more than sensed, that they were in a region of knives. Both Alvarez and Bill were more alert, more sharp of eyes as their heads turned; she held one arm of each, and the arm was

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rigid. On one occasion both glanced backwards, as though they wondered how H.M. would fare.

This old pirate, though he wheezed and grunted, marched behind his corporation as steadily as they. His wicked little eye, darting right and left, was even more alert than that of Alvarez. H.M. had not mentioned one of his purchases that day. But the broad Riff knife, whetted on both sides, and with a tightly woven haft, rested in a leather sheath in his deep hip pocket.

"Listen!" whispered Paula. Again they all stood still.

From behind another black door in these windowless walls, a man's very deep, slow-speaking voice seemed to plead or argue, with a growl of approval or dissent from other voices, as though urging a sacred cause.

"What is it?" asked Paula.

"Come along, Mrs. Bentley. And the rest of you." Again Alvarez urged them all forward. "It is only a wise man who can read and write, reading aloud the daily newspaper in Arabic."

On they went at a pace which made them stumble and took Paula's breath away.

"You see, Mrs. Bentley," muttered Alvarez, "most of this region—as a rule, I mean—is as innocent as that. There is always possible trouble, of course. I do not think we are in danger now."

But they were. H.M.'s eye had spotted what Alvarez had missed.

Just ahead on the left was another ill-smelling alley. Against its far wall, facing out, was what appeared to be a white patch against darker white. The thief-cum-cut-throat, who was not an Arab but some little Middle European with greasy hair bound round and round his head, wore a white Arab *jalebah* without a hood. He seemed to melt against the wall. His right hand, well behind him, held the slender knife which was meant to rip out and up into the entrails.

Alvarez, Paula, and Bill were just passing the mouth of the alley. H.M., slowing his pace, sauntered on as the other three hurried ahead.

The little thief, now crouching, saw in this man only what his favourite newspapers told him was a fat symbol of money and despotism. As the barrel-shaped man passed the mouth of the alley, Middle Europe would attract his attention, make him turn full face, and then . . .

"Uh-huh," softly murmured Sir Henry Merrivale.

He was now at the mouth of the alley.

White robe had moved out from the wall, tensed for his leap. Sharply a pebble rattled and rolled. H.M. twitched his head round, made a feint to turn his body round too; and instantly swung backwards and to the right. Middle Europe, over-coiled like a spring, could not stop his own leap.

Dimly the white robe flashed out of the alley, and a knife shot outwards and upwards against nothing. H.M.'s powerful left hand whacked down on Middle Europe's head, seizing and rolling a good handful of hair to hold hard. As he forced the man downwards,

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H.M.'s right hand drove the Riff knife through the side of white robe's throat, just behind the Adam's apple.

Instantly whipping out the knife, he swung Middle Europe away from him by the hair, to avoid jetting blood. He cleansed the knife on the writhing robe. Then, still clutching the man by the hair, H.M. let him fall back softly into the alley.

"Hem!" said H.M., as though concluding some small but necessary duty like washing his hands. Though he slid the knife back into its sheath, he looked innocently away as he did so. Then he did not make too obvious haste to close in behind the others.

But Alvarez knew, by the slight turn of his head. The little matter had not been quite as noiseless as H.M. had imagined. Bill guessed, too. As for Paula . . .

"Please tell me," she managed to say in a small voice, "H.M. killed or hurt somebody back there, didn't he?"

"*Me?*" breathed a voice of outraged piety. "Oh, my dolly! That's a shockin' thing to say. If some brisk feller had a go at me in the dark, I'd flop down in two seconds."

"Somehow," said Bill, "I doubt that."

Alvarez cut off the question at the root.

"Forget the matter," he said incisively. "Whatever was done, it was well done." Alvarez was now on edge. "Bear right at the turning; we are there."

Straight ahead, at a very slight downwards slope, was a real street. That is to say, it was two dozen feet wide; it was paved evenly with square stone slabs, very faintly glistening. At its far end loomed the silhouette of a squat Moorish tower, pierced by a broad and pointed arch with a light somewhere vaguely beyond it.

On their left, towards the arch, ran what appeared to be one long building, of stone once white; but there were different roof levels. On their left, past a grey stone wall only four or five feet high, ran a garden of orange and pineapple trees set close yet in neat Arab rows. Murmurous in the breeze, the garden went on to a house near the Moorish tower.

Alvarez glanced towards the shadowed side of the building on the left.

"Walk in the same order," he directed in a low voice. "Near the wall of this building here, but a little out; not too close."

Then it happened with blinding speed.

Bill's long left arm shot out in a lunge, closing round Paula and yanking her back to safety behind his left side.

"Down!" he yelled. "*Down!*"

Paula flopped down, as did Alvarez. Bill, whipping out the Webley, went down only on one knee and looked up. H.M. was well to the rear, and standing up. Only Bill and H.M. saw the streak of the thrown knife whip out of the tree, whistle downwards across the spot where Paula would have been standing, smash its point low against the stone wall opposite, and rattle down.

Bill, the Webley in his hand, sprang to his feet, studied the trees for a fraction of a second, and then fired twice. Somebody screamed,

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and the two heavy explosions had not died away before a body whacked out of an orange tree into underbrush, rolling limply to the ground inside the garden wall.

" Got him," said Bill casually. " I thought I remembered that place, four oranges together like a half-circle, where he leaned out to throw . . . Baggage, are you all right ? "

" Darling, yes ! "

" Get behind me," said Bill, facing the line of trees. " Completely behind me ! "

" I'm not the least b-bit f-frightened," gasped Paula, obeying his orders and putting her arms round his waist. " Really I'm not."

" That was well done, Bill," Alvarez muttered, with suppressed delight. " They know we're here ; and Ali must have a bigger gang than we thought." Alvarez hesitated. " That knife was intended for Pa—" He stopped. " It would have gone—" Alvarez's gesture indicated a motion down past the collarbone and into the body.

" Right," said Bill.

" She's the only one who can identify Collier," said Alvarez. " But Collier can't throw knives. He's inside. Wait here ; don't do anything foolish until I return."

HE seemed to melt down into shadows. Probably through a concealed door, Paula thought, to meet Acting Commandant Perez. As a matter of fact, she was quite right.

Bill continued to study the trees of the garden.

" Come on, you sneaking bastards ! " he shouted, swinging the Webley loosely. " Who's got the nerve to throw another knife ? "

Inside the garden a wild parakeet shrieked, so horribly like the voice of Ilone Scherbatsky that for an instant they imagined they saw her face among the trees.

Again Alvarez's hand fell softly on Bill's shoulder while the Commandant beckoned H.M. closer.

" From now on, Bill, you must obey orders to the letter. Got that ? No matter what happens, I repeat : no matter what happens, you must not fire that revolver. Do you understand ? "

" Look here, Juan." Bill's whisper was friendly but warning. " You brought Paula here as bait ; or, anyway, Colonel Duroc did. You know what almost happened. If there's the slightest danger to her, in any way . . . you know what you can do with your orders, don't you ? "

" I promise you there will not be. If my promise is fulfilled, will you obey to the letter ? "

" All right." Bill slid the revolver back into the holster.

" Sir Henry," went on the insistent voice, " go with the others to the end of the street,"—a dark arm pointed towards the arch—" turn left, then inside the house, then downstairs to the big basement where the carpets are piled. Make no sound ; stand just inside the door ; but, for the last time, do not move or speak unless I give some signal. Now I must leave you."

Alvarez vanished like a ghost.

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" C'mon," grunted the Old Maestro ; and again they moved ahead with H.M. in place of Alvarez.

They emerged from the arch into a sort of modern-built tunnel, common enough in the Kasbah, and open left and right at both ends. A stronger breeze swept through, with a smell of the clean Mediterranean, of dead fish, and the thickish pleasant odour of Tangier itself. Underfoot the ground was hard and sandy.

On their left, as they emerged, was a newly whitewashed wall with a large Moorish-arched door a little way to the left. Two electric bulbs, under yellow small boxes against the wall, gave the only light.

" I—I know where we are," gulped Paula against that strong wind. " If the worst part of it is over now . . ."

" Baggage," Bill told her very gently, " the worst part hasn't even begun yet."

The quiet words struck them dumb, together with the steady intent look in Bill's eyes. With one accord they moved three abreast, as before, and into the Moorish arch of premises which belonged to Ali, the carpet dealer.

Inside they could see a hall, also of whitewashed stone walls, perhaps ten feet wide. At the left a painted, graceful Moorish staircase ascended into darkness. At the right were several arches, but only one large one inside of which, on the thickness of the wall, had been painted a black arrow pointing downwards. Underneath ran the black painted legend, both in English and French, " Carpets and Antiques." No noise stirred. The whole house might have been empty.

A wooden staircase descended into gloom faintly lit with a dim yellow light some distance away. H.M. framed his villainous mouth for lip-reading.

" Keep to the wall," his mouth framed the words, " and follow me down."

They now moved, in single line, against a long wall that ran at right angles to the foot of the stairs. Some little distance ahead there was a smaller Moorish arched door, from which yellow light fell distinctly out across the stone floor.

H.M. thrust his bald head slowly round the edge of the door. His lip movements, at such close range, were terrifyingly easy to read as he turned back. First, according to his directions, Bill slipped into the room and slid across inside with his back to the wall. Then Paula. Finally H.M.

It was a vast room nearly forty feet square, though with a rather low ceiling for such proportions. Not quite in the middle, but pushed somewhat towards the watchers' left, was a square pile of carpets about three feet high. The carpets, topside-up, glowed with sombre, deep, and sullen colours ; each one was twenty feet square ; and, being thin, their surface was as hard as turf.

In the whitewashed wall towards the watchers' left, there were two tall arched windows of crimson glass panes, the windows set very wide apart. They were partly hung with robes such as H.M.

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had bought, with what looked like the gleaming white-gold of a scimitar-scabbard, with a dagger in a heavy dark-blue sheath, with a Moorish war-hammer in steel. Between the two windows stretched a kind of immense sideboard of carved blackish wood: above it a long mirror in a black wooden enclosure, its surface scattered with grotesque curios.

In the wall opposite the spectators stood another presumed sideboard, as long as the first and set close to it. Thus, directly across the room from the Moorish arched door by which they had entered, was another door just like it.

The third and last side (not counting the cleared wall against which they stood) should have had more room away from the twenty-foot-square pile of carpets, but on that side were big white painted pigeon-holes containing bolts or long yards of cloth or velvet or damask; and, in the middle of them, an immense velvet-covered board artfully laid out with flat weapons. A large lamp of Moorish brasswork, hanging from the ceiling, lighted the silent room.

On top of the pile of carpets, near the right-hand end of it and with his back to them, stood Collier.

COLLIER could not see them because he was too much concentrated on the door directly opposite across the room. Beyond the arch of this door burned a faint light, but it led to a crooked tiled passage. Apparently an empty passage.

There was not even a rustle of leather as Bill drew the .45 from the holster, and his hand went up. For an instant he glanced across at H.M.

"Never thought I'd shoot a man in the back." Bill's lips framed the words. "But Coll . . ."

Both H.M.'s hands swept across Paula's and tightened powerfully round Bill's arm.

"No," his lips outlined, with a weird and almost cross-eyed expression on his face. "You promised. You gave your word."

Though Bill protested in furious mimicry, he lowered his arm. H.M. glanced at the black head.

"That's— ?" his silent query went out. Paula nodded.

Still Collier tensely watched the open arch opposite, with its dim-burning lamp inside and its corridor beyond of white-plastered stone walls. Collier's right hand, formerly concealed in front of him, now slipped down to the side. He was carrying a .38 Colt's Banker's Special.

"He's got a gun," Bill addressed H.M. in a kind of silent shout. "If I ask him to turn round, we can shoot it out. That's fair play, isn't it?"

"And," silently roared back H.M., touching Paula, "have him fire at *her?*"

Instantly Bill's hand went down, and H.M.'s called for even more silence as they listened. Now they could hear footsteps.

The footsteps were on the tiles of that corridor beyond the door which Collier watched so tensely. Collier's gun hand came up. He

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stood near the right-hand side of that three-foot-high pile of rugs as hard as turf, and brought up the gun still further.

The footsteps, making no attempt at concealment, walked slowly and steadily without the least haste. Round a turning, and past a hidden light into full view in the narrow corridor, came Juan Alvarez.

All could see him, though Collier was much closer. In his left hand Alvarez still carried that odd little canvas bag. Otherwise he was not armed except for something he paused to discard at once. Plucking out the loop of the truncheon, Alvarez drew it down from under his waistcoat. He sent the truncheon thumping and clattering along the floor behind him.

Then Alvarez walked forward at the same pace to take Collier with his hands.

"So it's wise guy again, eh?" jeered Collier. "I thought it must be, when they let you in so easy." His voice changed. "But I ain't playing marbles, wise guy. Don't move. Or you'll get plenty heat."

Alvarez, a sauntering gentleman from his soft hat to his dark-grey suit, merely smiled without amusement.

Collier fired—and missed.

Alvarez, his contemptuous smile broadening, still walked forward.

Again Collier fired and missed. This time, somewhere, the bullet smashed a window.

Alvarez was now almost at the door. Collier, though always prudent, ran forward on the right-hand side of the carpet pile, hardly five feet from Alvarez just inside the door.

Then Collier, to make sure, fired three quick shots at what seemed very close range. Actually, it was not as close as that. The first bullet struck Alvarez in the left chest below the collar-bone, spinning his shoulder and side partway to the left; the second and third bullets missed.

At the first of those three shots, Bill Bentley ripped loose from H.M.'s hands. One leap carried him to the top of the carpet pile, and noiselessly he raced across it.

Now he rammed the muzzle of the Webley so viciously into the back of Collier's neck that the man's head jerked and he almost toppled off the carpet pile.

"Drop the gun," Bill said, not loudly. "Drop it now, or I'll blow the front of your head off."

A .45 has a hard trigger pull. Bill meant quite simply what he said. With the muzzle jammed hard against the back of his neck Collier could feel the very faint vibration of the frame as Bill began to squeeze the trigger.

"Okay, bud." As though indulging a child, Collier threw out the Banker's Special, which landed on the carpeted floor. "But you'll get plenty for this."

"Juan," Bill shouted. "Are you all right?"

Alvarez's voice, hearty and firm as usual, showed a trace of amusement. "Very fit, thanks," he answered. "No wound that could trouble a baby."

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"Thank God! I was afraid . . . Never mind. Pick up his gun, will you, and join H.M. and Paula at the other side."

Still carrying the grey canvas bag, Alvarez moved round the carpet pile with such damn-you determination that no one observed anything until H.M. saw him.

"Now, up with your hands," Bill said to Collier. "Better behave."

Collier hesitated, and raised his hands. Bill made a hard, quick search with his left hand, finding nothing dangerous except the long thin dagger done up in wrapping paper which Collier had bought at the ironmonger's. This Bill flung behind him over the pile of carpets.

With the Webley now jammed into Collier's back, Bill manœuvred him to the exact centre of the carpet. Darting back, Bill told him to turn round.

Collier lumbered round, his hands still up. Bill, on the carpet about eight feet away and facing him now, kept the Webley trained on the middle of Collier's belly. "Put your hands down now," he said.

Collier's heavy shoulders quivered as he put down his hands. His dull eyes opened wide, then narrowed as his lip lifted at the corner.

"What's the big idea?" he drawled lazily. "Whadaya think *you're* doing, fancy pants?"

"You'll find out," said Bill, giving him back just as meaning a look. "H.M.," he called, with no movement of his head or the Webley.

"All present and correct, son," returned the reassuring rumble of H.M.'s voice.

"I read somewhere you were either a barrister or a doctor . . ."

"It's all right, son. In my younger and more asinine days I was both. —I'll take care of Alvarez. Just stand there and think where you'd like to shoot the blighter when you do plug him."

"But I assure you, Sir Henry, that I am quite all right," Alvarez said, with a slight laugh.

"Shut up," said H.M.

He quickly unbuttoned jacket, waistcoat, and shirt, slitting down the under shirt and pushing it aside like the shirt. Then, slipping the knife back, he held back linen and cloth with his left hand and studied the chest wound with the torch in his right.

It did not take long. His fingers were gentle. Alvarez's fingers, as he impatiently replaced and rebuttoned the clothes, were not at all gentle.

"Now listen, son!" He spoke in a fierce whisper. "I think that bullet more than grazed your left lung before it ploughed up into the shoulder."

"Well?"

"Lord love a duck, don't you twig it yet? I said *lung*. Unless we get you to a nursin' home for an operation within half an hour or so, you're finished. You'll die."

"Die? But what does it matter?" Alvarez asked. "Provided,"

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—his right hand, still holding the snub-nosed Colt, stabbed out with ferocity towards Collier—" I first smash and then arrest *that*."

Suddenly something flickered in his eyes.

" Maureen . . ." he began, and stopped.

Paula, who had been kneeling beside him, now stood up. Since she had wiped blood-stained hands on her slacks and also touched her hair as she threw it back, she was as wild-looking a figure as any.

" Maureen will understand," she said.

" Sir Henry," Alvarez said gently, " you force me to remind you that I am still in command here." His voice hardened, though he coughed. Out he spoke on the old note. " Bill ! "

" Yes, old boy ? "

" Now be good enough," Alvarez said formally to H.M., " to climb up on the carpets, take the Webley from Bill, and keep Collier covered while I speak to Bill privately. Should Collier attempt to run, shoot him through the head. I am sure, sir, you understand the necessity."

" It's a pleasure ! " bellowed H.M., and the thunder echoed back.

H.M. climbed up on the carpets. He muttered instructions and took the Webley from Bill, who leaped down nimbly from the carpets.

Alvarez stood very erect, holding the canvas bag still in his left hand. " I am going to smash him," he said through his teeth, and nodded towards Collier.

His left hand opened, and the canvas bag dropped to the floor. Its drawstring was loose. Out rolled a single boxing glove, presumably one of two pairs in the bag.

" Me hurt ? " He smiled. " It is nonsense. Watch ! "

Squaring himself, Alvarez began to throw out the sketch of a left hook. His left shoulder went up, the arm darted out in time with his forward-thrust left leg.

Abruptly Alvarez stopped. It was not the intensity of pain which burnt through his shoulder. This he would not have minded. But he could not use the arm. He would have toppled straight forward if Bill had not thrown a quick left arm round his other side, and caught him in front with his right. Gently Bill eased him back to standing position.

" Easy, old boy. Easy does it, now."

Alvarez looked strangely at his left arm, and slowly lowered it.

" I can't do it," he whispered, in blank amazement.

" Look here, old boy," Bill said quietly. " Would you like *me* to have a go at him ? "

Alvarez hesitated. He turned round.

" *Would* you ? " he asked eagerly, in a low voice.

" Yes," said Bill.

" Hard to tell you this." Alvarez spoke rapidly, clutching at Bill's arm. " Sounds too foolish. But a word like—well, sportsmanship. That's all I ever worshipped. Would be as good as smashing him myself. To see him smashed. By a sportsman."

" Here," muttered Bill. " That's all right," he added.

" *Can* you smash him, Bill ? "

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" Dunno," said Bill, wiping his mouth with the back of a heavy left hand. " May not have a ghost of a chance. But I'll try, so help me."

He threw off his coat, flung it on the floor, and did the same with his necktie.

But Alvarez, though he did not know it, had bodily fever mounting into his head from his wound. He almost babbled.

" Now listen ! " he whispered. " This afternoon, at the tailor's, Mark Hammond said something. Can I remember ? Something like : ' There's only one kind of amateur who might beat Collier in a short fight. That's a pure slogger, who'd trade punches like Collier himself, and might land a haymaker.' "

Bill looked down at his hands, spreading the fingers.

" Wait, wait," urged Alvarez, as though talking against time. " You know his strength, and above all his weaknesses. That gives you more help. Do you remember what you heard on the 'phone ? "

" Oh, yes. Funny, that. But I remember."

" Now hear *my* advice. Don't stand and slog with him—not at first, anyway. Don't let him crowd you or stalk you. Get in fast ; punch hard ; get out fast. Keep him moving. He may be sluggish and slow, but for God's sake mind his punch."

" Haven't got much guard," said Bill. " Got to stand and take it. To hell with him."

" Anyway, I think you've got a harder punch, especially your straight right and right cross. Measure him. Remember, this must be a short fight or he may give you too much punishment. If I see an opportunity for you, I'll shout, ' Now ! ' Got that, Bill ? ' *Now !* ' Then go for him all out." Now the fever had reached his eyes. " Can't think—anything else. Must be lots."

" I've got everything," said Bill.

" Stop ! Forgot . . . Must have something else for myself ! "

" Juan ! " exclaimed Paula. " Where you going ? "

" Back in a moment," he assured them. " Must fetch . . . "

Straight-shouldered, Alvarez walked stiffly away along the open space towards their right.

There was only eerie silence.

Alvarez returned. He had located a high, square table, with thick curved ebony legs and a mosaic top, which he asked Bill to move over to the edge of the ring.

" Will you help me to stand up on this ? " he requested, his face now composed and like that of a hanging judge. From the top of the table he looked down at Bill.

" Have you any more cartridges for the Webley ? " he asked in a cold and steady manner. Bill fished in his discarded coat and gave him a handful, which he dropped in his coat. " Now get the Webley from Sir Henry, and bring it to me. There is one more bullet left in the Colt, and I can keep Collier from running."

Bill leaped up on the carpets and murmured something to H.M., who handed over the Webley.

Jumping down again, Bill put the Webley in Alvarez's left hand.

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Scooping the boxing gloves back into the canvas bag, he took the bag with him when he returned and stood beside H.M.

Alvarez's voice ripped across the room.

"And now, Mr. Collier, we will deal with *you*."

Collier stood alone. In the middle of the dark yet rich colours of the carpet, he stood with his back to one so-called "sideboard," with its mirror and curios. His broad, thick body seemed planted there, legs apart.

"Why, if it ain't wise guy again," he said, in a sort of bored recognition. "Whadaya know!"

Alvarez's expression and voice did not change.

"You are now trapped and surrounded. You cannot leave this room. I imagine you don't believe that?"

"I just don't scare easy," Collier said. "What do *you* think?"

"What I think, either of you or of your half-witted style of speech, is of no importance. I *tell* you what is so. When you leave this room, you will be taken to the police station. Either you will leave here with one bullet in you, exactly where you fired it into me, or else you will leave quietly and with no shooting. The choice depends on you. To leave quietly, my good scum, you must first stand and fight."

"Fight?" echoed Collier. For a moment he hesitated, and his dull sly eyes seemed pleased as he licked his lips. "Sure, wise guy, why not? Who's the guy I'm gonna fight?"

"*I* am," snarled Bill, taking a step forward and emptying the two pairs of gloves on the floor.

"The carpets will be your ring," said Alvarez. "You will fight only three rounds. However, you may have professional three-minute rounds and fight according to American rules since you are a naturalized American . . ."

Out roared Sir Henry Merrivale.

"Stow that gab!" said H.M. "That louse isn't even a naturalized American. His passport's a fake."

"*What's that?*" demanded Alvarez.

"Oh, son! Didn't I tell you we, meaning the Colonel and myself, mostly the Colonel doin' the cabling had a lot more evidence about him, a lot you didn't know? Duroc got down to business as soon as I told him this hyena's passport was a forgery."

"But you did not see the passport?"

"I didn't need to. I heard all about it. Son, don't you remember readin' it aloud at the flat? Place of birth: Moscow, Russia. That's all right. But this feller here had to make it too clever. He stuck on a rubber stamp with the written date of his naturalization."

"Well?"

"No American passport has ever had that," retorted H.M., leering at Alvarez, "and none ever will. No such passport was ever issued from Washington or any consulate. 'Collier' is a fake. So Duroc got on the cable and even the 'phone. But we got back replies from several cities as well as the F.B.I. that nearly burnt the paint off the desk."

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Collier smirked and seemed almost pleased.

"He was born in Russia, all right. Learned his trade as a diamond cutter there, and in Amsterdam. Sneaked into the States; nobody knows how.

"He's wanted for murder in Cleveland. But something more fetching—they want him in Chicago for manslaughter, maybe murder. He'd pinched a car and was spotted. He was making a getaway, very fast, when he tried to turn and ran up over the pavement. A little girl was rollin' a hoop near the fence. Good old Collier could have missed her, easily. There were no trees or lamp-posts on the outside. But he was feeling . . . well, maybe a little mean. So he ran over her and crushed her and killed her. She was nine years old."

Collier yawned. "Well, she'll never be ten," he remarked.

There was dead silence, except for a hissing of indrawn breath.

"Pop here," said Collier, putting a toothpick inside his jeering mouth, "give a spiel about my record. That's okay by me. You can't catch me, wise guy. Nobody ever can." His mouth spread wide. "But do I fight, or don't I?"

"You fight," snapped Alvarez. He pointed to the corner between the two sideboards, at the further angle of the carpet. "There's your corner." Then he pointed to the angle between the broad open space and the pigeonholes of folded material. "There is yours, Mr. Bentley."

"As *Mr.* Collier would say," rattled Alvarez, "we have no seconds, no water bottles, above all no mouthpieces. We have not even a referee . . ."

"Oh, yes, you have," thundered H.M., yanking off his jacket, and pitching it over the edge of the ring. "I'm your referee, and don't think I'm not!"

"Good!" said Alvarez.

Collier's wicked low-lidded gaze was fixed on Bill.

"You're a amachoor, kid," he said. "I can smell 'em. I'm gonna take you apart." His rasping tenor grew gentle. "But I'm a good-hearted joe, see? Don't blame me when I break your jaw or split your cheek or put your eyesight so's nobody can fix it. Blame wise guy."

"Turn round," ordered Alvarez.

Collier's eyes moved back. The boxing gloves lay at his feet. In his right hand Alvarez held the Colt, with its one bullet; in his left hand he held with difficulty the heavy, cocked Webley.

"One final warning," he said in a clear but rasping voice. "If at any time you should try to run from the ring and get away, you will be shot through the head. Now I daresay you suppose, as in all things, this is bluff?"

"I told you I don't bluff easy," said Collier, again almost laughing. "Now I ask you—would I get scared about this?"

"Then you must be taught," said Alvarez. He whipped out his right arm and fired.

Again the sharpened *crack* of noise, unnerving, was rolled back

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and smothered in its echoes. In the mirror of a sideboard, well behind Collier, there jumped the black spot of the bullet-hole, surrounded by long cracks where it had drilled cleanly without smashing the whole mirror.

Collier's right hand darted to the right side of his head. A narrow but thick plume of dyed black hair, shredding in the air with the red roots intermingled, had flown out as the bullet flashed past without even burning the scalp, and the hair had now settled gently on the carpet.

Dropping the empty Colt, Alvarez shifted into his right hand the heavy, hair-trigger Webley.

"Now a final warning. If you strike one foul blow—just one, remember—you will be shot through the body."

"Skip it, wise guy," Collier tried to say nonchalantly. "What if I foul the kid by accident?"

"You will be shot just the same . . . That is all. We will dispense with any preparatory signal for seconds out of the ring. The rounds will begin, and end, when I call, 'Time.' Mr. Referee! Let them come out of their corners; give them brief instructions . . . We can begin."

PICKING up the gloves, Collier swung his shoulders as he strolled to his corner between the sideboards. There he took off his coat, his tie, and also his shirt, sweeping aside curios with a crash so that he could put the clothes on the sideboard. He wore no undershirt.

His torso, red-speckled and matted with reddish hair, was rounded and hard without obvious muscles to show his great punching power. As he pulled on the gloves, perhaps that torso was not in as good condition as it appeared under shirt and coat. But he was obviously unbeatable by an amateur; still formidable and still tricky.

Bill, in the other corner, instantly tore off his shirt. He himself had never troubled to wear an undershirt, and he had a belt as Collier had. Bill, not in the least hirsute, showed white and in perfect condition under the Moorish lamp. His legs shook a trifle. H.M. glanced across at Alvarez.

"This idea of a boxing ring full of flyin' bullets," he said in a musing tone; "well, now, that's unusual. But I like it, son. Only, for the love of Esau, don't hit young Bentley and don't hit me."

"I promise, sir."

Bill, moving slowly to the middle of the ring, saw Collier loom up in grotesque shape. Collier opened wide oyster-coloured eyes tinged with yellow.

"I'm gonna murder you, amachoor," he said, and looked as though he could.

Abruptly all Bill's nervousness vanished. To the astonishment of Collier, who liked to scare people, in Bill's eyes appeared a glint of pure enjoyment.

"Now, listen, both of you," said H.M., his fists on his hips. "The Commandant says you've got to fight by American rules. To me that's eyewash; but do it. That means"—here he turned to

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Bill—" that practically anything goes, except what I'll tell you. You can punch in the clinches, but only if you've got both hands free. No holdin' with one arm and punchin' with the other fist. No shoving or wrestling ; and anybody who hits on the break will get a thick ear from me. What's more, unless you want a swipe over the eye, don't let me see a low blow, a rabbit punch, or a kidney punch. Got that ? Right.

" You know the rules about knockdowns, or you wouldn't be here. Neutral corner, and don't come out till I tell you. If somebody's knocked off the carpets, we'll treat it as though he'd been knocked through the ropes.

" Now this skunk," continued H.M., casually jerking his thumb towards Collier, " may try any dirty trick he's used to. Jam the thumb of his glove into your eye, butt his head under your chin or jaw, foul you with outlawed punches . . . well, there are a lot of 'em. But remember, if he does, he'll get a bullet through his guts. So he may be as clean as he's ever been."

Then this curious referee paused to consider.

" No, don't shake hands," he added sharply, as Bill made a tentative movement. " I wouldn't have you touch Collier's filthy gloves for a million in cash. That's all ! Go to your corners, and come out when the Commandant calls ' Time.' "

Bill turned and ran lightly back. Collier stood for a moment, shoulders quivering.

" Look, Pop," he said. " If you wasn't an old man . . ."

" So ? " inquired H.M.

Again Collier hesitated.

" So ? " repeated H.M.

From his hip pocket he drew a broad knife sharpened to a hair line, whetting his thumb on the blade. He looked straight down into Collier's eyes.

Collier, sneering, moved off towards his own corner.

Hurrying back to *his* corner, Bill for some reason was startled to see Paula. It shook his heart, unnerving him a little. Paula could get her shoulders and arms well over the edge of the carpet. She was standing down at the angle, arms stretched out on the carpet, head raised.

" Bill," she whispered. " Luck ! "

" Don't worry, baggage," he said. " Be all right."

" I'm gonna take you apart ! " screeched Collier across the sombre yet vivid colours of the carpet. " And you know why ! " He gulped. " Stuck-up Limey . . . Jeez, how I hate Britishers. I'm gonna slam your kidneys through your back."

Bill's voice, though not loud, carried clearly across the ring.

" Stop your brag," he said. " Let's see you fight."

" *Time,*" snapped Alvarez.

PAULA saw Bill at a half-dance, his left glove out, his right well up but unobtrusive near his side. She knew his shoes, rough soles and rough heels, wouldn't slip on that coloured carpet. She wanted to put her head down, and couldn't.

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Alvarez, standing at the height of the ring midway at one side, kept his eyes flickering between his wrist watch and the two fighters. He held the Webley half raised in his right hand.

Collier, drawing a deep breath into his thick chest, attempted to dance out like his opponent. Only then did he understand, as he should have understood long ago, that whatever springiness he had ever possessed in his legs was now gone. To dance out like that would make him look foolish, and you must never impair the dignity of G. W. Collier.

Instead he prowled out and stalked out, left arm and glove across him at chin height, right hand held dangerously low. They met near the middle of the ring, with H.M. dodging behind them. Bill was always moving, never in the same place. Collier merely stood, pivoting right and left like a heavy gun. Both men's left hands went out together, with a light *whick-whick* of leather against leather, measuring for distance.

Bill darted to the right. He darted back to the left. Then, darting in over Collier's too-low right hand, he drove a hard left hook to the cheekbone and rocked Collier's head. As the glove thudded against the cheekbone, Collier had that old familiar ringing in his head. Infuriated, he fired back his deadliest weapon: the "killer" right cross. But it went so wild that Bill did not even have to slip it. A strange, puzzled look flashed across Collier's eyes.

Again Bill lammed Collier with a hard left to the belly, making Collier grunt. But Collier, thinking for himself, decided it was time to quit fooling around. He'd go in and just bust this guy who hadn't even no hair on his chest. Collier lashed out with the one-two: left hook to the head and straight right to the ribs. Both punches seared through Bill's defence, and thudded hard.

"Haah!" grunted Collier, breathing too hard.

He waded in and crowded, throwing every punch he knew in such a fast and murderous flurry of gloves that H.M. had hard work to follow it.

And Bill, against all advice, was furious enough to stand and slug it out with him.

No, no! screamed some noise inside Alvarez's head, as his eyes flickered dully to the watch and up again. But, if you must do it, use your right hand!

In that thumping flurry, with gloves blurred as they moved, Bill was being hurt—badly. Collier's left pounded him under the breastbone, dangerously near the solar plexus. Collier's right jolted him hard under the heart. And both punches make you feel as though the innards had been drawn out of you. Though many of the punches flew wild over Bill's shoulders, and he caught more on his elbows or gloves, Collier was hammering and hammering through.

A swinging right opened a small cut over Bill's left eye. Almost instantly, again Collier's deadly right smashed in under the left eye. And again. It would raise a swelling which might well close the eye. Again Collier fired for it, and landed.

Paula could not watch this, especially when it was Bill's blood. She put her face against the carpet.

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Your right hand, she was praying without words. Bill! Your right hand!

Step by step Collier drove him back, presumably to send him over the carpet edge with a right cross. Bill—battered, shaky on his legs, wind going—fought back viciously. He hammered Collier's belly with his left, and drove left hooks that made Collier's face swell red. But still, faintly believing he knew his own stamina, he would not throw his right hand.

The stink of sweat, the closeness of Collier's eyes and Collier's arms, revolted him far more than the blood trickling down on his own left eyebrow. Another right thudded under his heart, and he gasped. By the movement of Collier's left shoulder, Bill guessed the man would throw a dummy punch over his shoulder so that Collier could fall into a clinch.

Wedging both gloves against Collier's shoulders, Bill with a heave of sheer main strength flung the man off. Collier staggered back, and almost fell. Swinging to the right, Bill tried to move lightly and easily backwards about four feet inside the line of carpet and towards his own corner.

But Collier, also wheeling, came stalking in. Both gloves moved slowly under his chin, under the leer of his triumphant eyes and mouth. His right cheek, red and swollen, looked at close range as though it might have been split. Yet Bill could not see this, even if it were not for blinding sweat on his own face. Blood slowly spilled on his left eyelid, and he felt the skin stretch underneath it as the swelling rose to close it.

Get ready!

One of Collier's hands telegraphed a straight right to the head. But that was only an old trick. His left hand shot out and a little up, slamming Bill again not far from the solar plexus.

Bill's breath seemed to explode from his mouth; he staggered, and fell on one knee.

Alvarez, trying to steady his uncertain eyesight on the watch, groaned aloud.

Paula, who had her face down on the carpet, opened one eye just before that. Now she buried her face in the carpet.

At least, she was thinking, it'll be over in a moment. He won't be hurt any longer. That's the main thing. And yet . . . if only . . .

She was roused again by the high, giggling sneer which Collier used for a laugh.

"Amachoors," panted Collier, his red chest heaving. "Sure, they wanna go for the head. No body punches. Naw. They . . ."

"There's your neutral corner!" roared Sir Henry Merrivale, pointing behind him at the far angle of the carpets at the other side of Collier's own corner. "Do you get back there, or do you wait till Christmas before I begin counting?"

Collier, about to sneer, thought better of it and trotted back. But he still faced the side of the ring where H.M., bending over Bill on one knee, had begun to count. As he passed Alvarez, Collier was raising and lowering his arms and elbows fowl-fashion.

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Good God! thought Alvarez. That swine is arm-weary at the end of the first minute in the first round. His wind is going, too. It can't be possible . . . ?

"*One!*" roared H.M. "You don't fool me, son. *Two!* What game are you playin', hey? *Three!*"

Bill quietly brought the breath back into his lungs. When he raised his head, H.M. saw that his eyes were both clear, though one was half-closed. He had been badly hurt and he ached, but his stamina remained. With one glove he wiped the blood from his left eye, and wiped the glove on his trousers.

"I'll take six, Maestro," he whispered. "I've taken his best punches. Now wait."

"*Four!* The weasel's not struck a foul blow yet. *Five!* Want me to give him half the knife? *Six!* But you don't need . . ."

Bill sprang to his feet, facing round to the other side.

Instantly Collier was moving out, prowling yet hurrying from the other corner.

As Bill passed Paula, he appeared in bad shape. His legs appeared not quite steady. Under the Moorish lamp another bright-red trickle of blood gleamed above his right eyebrow and the yellowish purple bruise beneath was swelling and closing. His torso showed the red splotches of body blows. His left hand hung down, his right barely up . . .

Dropping his left hand, Collier lunged forward with full power in his right hand against that smear of blood which gleamed over Bill's left eye.

Then Bill leapt suddenly to life.

Bill, slipping under the punch with head and shoulder moving to his right, caught Collier coming in. At the same instant Bill's heavy right first streaked out and thudded against the unprotected left side of Collier's jaw.

It was the hardest punch of the fight. Collier's legs shook; his head twitched while the film came over his eyes, and his gloves pawed the air. Immediately Bill drove into him with both hands—and made his greatest mistake. Or, at least, the matter is debatable.

Alvarez swore that Bill could have flung the attack to the head with both fists for a quick knockout. H.M. roared back, perhaps with the most reason, that the attack might have begun at the head; then travelled down and up again.

Anyway, Bill did neither. Putting his head down, he flew with both fists for the belly—Collier's weakest spot. The gloves flashed in and out like piston-rods, to gruesome and horrible noises spurting from Collier's mouth. Desperately he tried to straighten Bill up with short, chopping uppercuts from beneath.

He failed. Instead of diving into a clinch and holding on, Collier lost his head. All his ringcraft blew to pieces. Instinctively his right hand went up, to crack down on the back of Bill's neck with the forbidden rabbit punch.

Alvarez's right hand, holding the heavy and hair-trigger Webley, moved straight out in aim for Collier's arm.

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Then Alvarez fired. It was less a pistol shot than a heavy explosion.

Because the Commandant's eyesight was unsteady, the shot missed Collier's arm. But it would have blown off the forehead of Sir Henry Merrivale if H.M. had not dropped straight down on his face when he saw Alvarez's arm dart out. Collier, terrified and sick and hurt, at last drove his arms through Bill's and locked him in a clinch. The bullet tore open the looking glass, splitting it with cracks in all ways, sending great shards of the mirror crashing and clattering down.

"Break, you two!" yelled H.M., throwing up one hand from his position on the floor. "Break!"

It was unnecessary to tell them this. Collier, badly hurt and arm-weary, wanted a second to breathe. Bill, again wiping the blood from his eye, darted back three paces. But immediately, as H.M. stood up, they flew together.

Collier threw a swinging left, and Bill a straight right. By a fraction of a second Bill's straight right beat Collier to the punch. It broke Collier's nose, squashing it even flatter against the face, as Bill's right arm jerked up and blocked the other's left swing. Bill's own left hooked to the right of Collier's jaw. The man staggered back.

Juan Alvarez spoke out at last.

"*Now!*" he shouted. "*Get him!*"

Paula Bentley, well beyond Alvarez, seemed the strangest figure of all. When she thought her husband beaten and hurt, she would not cry or say a word. Yet she was now standing wide-eyed, the tears rolling down her face, uttering only incoherent noises, as she saw him go all out for the finish.

Four punches did it, as Bill drove Collier swiftly back towards the other side of the ring, the side with the second sideboard and a window of crimson glass on either side. Seeing that the side of Collier's right cheek was really split open, Bill would not hit it. He fired three battering-ram punches to the belly, and threw the right cross for the last time. Then he jumped aside.

Collier fell straight forward, as a man does when he is badly hurt. Before he fell, his glazing eyes still bulged with hatred and amazement. And hatred was still welling inside him as his heavy body crumpled face down on the carpet. He stirred, fighting in the dream of the knockout. His heavy legs straightened out. His arms and shoulders writhed, instinctively, so that he could roll parallel to the line of the carpet and get up.

But he rolled the wrong way—towards the edge of the carpets. The blood from his nose, a kind of moustache spreading down over his mouth, left a smear on the carpet edge as he turned over. And Collier, the sneer gone from his face, fell heavily between sideboard and carpet pile, and lay still.

Silence.

It seemed to stretch out interminably, while nobody moved or spoke.

"*Time!*" snapped Alvarez, and carefully lowered his left arm.

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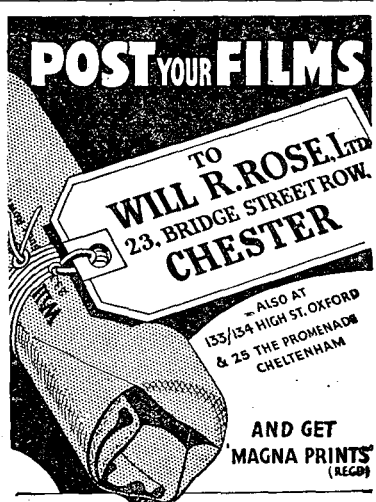

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With the same studious care he pushed on the safety catch of the Webley, and dropped it on the carpeted floor.

Three minutes. All of it, including that space after the knockout, had happened within three minutes.

Bill, mechanically wiping his left eye with his glove, still stood staring dully down over the edge of the carpet. Alvarez, still straight, surreptitiously saluted him with hand to hat brim. If Maureen Holmes had been there, she would understand the one word which H.M. had applied to him in the tailor's shop. Alvarez was of a breed long-lost in time: one contemptuous of wounds, refusing to yield; a fool, perhaps; yet once the most dreaded fighting man on earth—the Conquistador of Spain.

Without fuss, Alvarez carefully began to lower himself from the table.

Bill Bentley turned slowly away from the edge of the carpet, as though musing on some deep problem. He walked back to the middle of the carpet in the same thoughtful mood; then his legs tottered, and he fell flat on his face.

Paula let out a cry. She flung off the woolly tan coat, and in yellow sweater and black slacks she climbed up on the carpet. She tried frantically to turn him over on his back. But Bill was not unconscious; merely exhausted and hurt. Under his own power Bill rolled over, closing his eyes against the light. Paula threw herself on his chest, pouring out words but sobbing so much that not one word in ten was coherent.

"Told you it'd be all right," muttered Bill, patting her back with the underside of a stained glove.

THE big room was still silent. Then H.M., with his acute hearing, peered round. Through the Moorish arch which led to the little curving corridor, on slippers all but noiseless, moved an Arab girl in a grey *jalebah*, its head cloth ending in a flat square top like a mortar board. A fine-spun *yashmak*, with black lace edging, was drawn up under her black liquid eyes. In her hands she carried a silver tray with a very clean brass bowl of hot water, a box of modern surgical gauze, a little box of adhesive tape, bottles from a modern chemist, scissors, cloths, and other objects he did not observe.

Knowing the girl's errand to be merciful, H.M. glanced at the other side of the ring. For the first time H.M. saw that Alvarez had gone from the table. Hurrying across to the other side, he slid down the carpets and stood up.

There sat Alvarez on the floor, his back propped up against the carpet pile, dreamily smoking a cigarette.

"Now looky here!" began the great man, with somewhat the air of a chastened Donald Duck. "I told you I was an old buffer, didn't I? I couldn't tell you, because I was refereein' the goddamndest prize fight that ever was fought. I kept nodding across to you, though I expect that didn't mean much. Son, that bullet never touched your lung. If it had, you couldn't possibly have kept speaking out the way you did."

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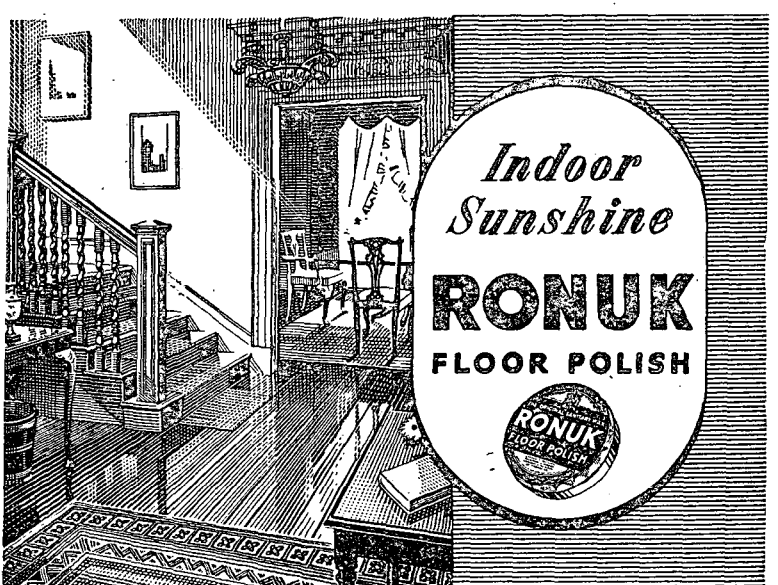

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Having unburdened himself, H.M.'s spectacles now grew stern.

" All the same, there's some bad interior bleeding. You're going to a nursing home as soon as I can find a tele— Hoy! Are you paying attention to me? What are you thinking about?"

Alvarez drew deeply at the cigarette, coughed as he let out the smoke, and contemplated smoke.

" I was thinking," he said rather bitterly, " of the Knight of La Mancha. How he dreamed of doing great deeds, yet there was not a person who did not laugh at him."

H.M. looked down sourly.

" For the love of Esau, stop this depression and be human again . . . Is there anything I can do for you?"

" Yes," Alvarez said, sitting up and remembering. " Thanks to Bill, we have taken Collier without firing a shot. Collier, in his pure conceit, thought the place was full of his men instead of mine. I must find Perez, and I have not as much voice left as you think. Get up on the carpet, please. Shout ' Perez ' several times, as loudly as you can. I shall follow in a moment; I must congratulate him."

" You stay where you are, son. Got that?"

Again, despite his corporation, H.M. climbed back again.

Bill lay stretched on his back in the middle of the carpet, one arm over his eyes. Every time he spoké, it seemed that his face swelled or ached; but the body bruises, some of which had seemed not bad at the time, were worse.

As they knelt on either side of him, there was a low-voiced furious argument in French between the Arab girl and Paula, whose purely hysterical jealousy would not let the other touch Bill.

" If you please, madame," begged the Arab girl, speaking French in a low, sweet voice, " I ask only because your own hands tremble badly. Regard them. And now regard this! The cut over the eye is not wide or deep. Regard, now!" Water sloshed. " We sponge it off, like this. We apply a little of antiseptic, so that it will not take harm . . ."

" *Ow!* Go easy!"

" Ilya will not hurt you, sir." The Arab girl spoke almost perfect French, her *yashmak* moving in and out with the words. Scissors clicked. " Now a small length of adhesive gauze, like this . . ." *Snip, snip, snip,* " Now there are soothing lotions to draw away pain . . ."

" We-ell," Paula conceded, and stood up.

Alvarez had crawled on his right side across the carpet to Bill. Bill was now sitting up, his head hanging over. The Arab girl had applied healing lotion to his face, and was now applying other lotion to his chest and shoulders.

" Cigarette, Bill?" offered Alvarez, holding out the cigarette and a lighter in his right hand.

" Thanks, old boy."

The Arab girl, taking cigarette and lighter, put the cigarette between his lips, kindled it, and handed back the lighter.

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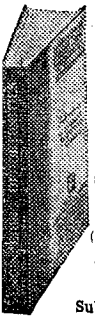

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"It was a great fight, Bill."

"No." Bill, head down, expelled smoke. "You know it wasn't. You could have smashed him in thirty seconds."

"All the same," said Alvarez, "I told Maureen this afternoon you could do him in one round."

Bill lifted and inspected his right hand. "This is my only gravedigger. Collier covered his chin too much with his left. Had to make him think I hadn't got anything before I could get it over. Cut it damn fine, at that."

Out from the tiled corridor thudded the heavy boots of a short thick-set man in white helmet and belt; he could be no other than Acting Commandant Perez.

"Commandant, you were wounded—!" he began in Spanish.

"Never mind. We've got him," retorted Alvarez in French, for the benefit of the others. "The pig Collier now lies on the floor, over there, between the carpets and the sideboard. Mr. Bentley . . ."

A brief, tight-closed smile flashed across Perez's brown face.

"We have seen it," he agreed. "What a box beautiful! But it is as well that already we have found the dummy window."

"What dummy window?"

"Did not Colonel Duroc speak to you of it? Well, no matter. It is *there*." And the Acting Commandant nodded towards the great arched window of crimson panes, the one to the left of the second sideboard, and over which on a metal rail hung the great

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wine-dark robes, the gleaming, scimitar scabbard, the dagger in its rough blue sheath, the Moorish war hammer.

"First," Perez rattled on, "we have measured the breadth of the wall. It looks itself out, apparently, on a sunken garden. But no! The wall is too thick. The window on the outside has the catch on the wrong side. There is a space between the walls, by which our man might again have dropped into a sewer and made escape."

Here the Acting Commandant sighed.

"By good fortune," he added, "the window catch on this side is rusted and hard to turn. But that is why we have put a guard. Thanks to Heaven, we do not need them."

"I—I ask your pardon," Paula turned to address the Moorish girl in a small voice, her head down. "I am often very stupid."

"Stupid?" echoed the Moorish girl. "Would that all women, madame, were as stupid as you."

"I am called Paula Bentley." She used French as had the other. "Who are you?"

"I am Ilya," replied the Arab girl bitterly, "the wife of Ali."

A stir went through the group.

"And I am here," she went on, "mainly to minister to this hurt gentleman. But also to plead with you that Ali and his four accomplices may not be tried before the court of the Mendoubya. It is a very just court," she added hastily, and shuddered. "But I plead because they would rather face the Evil One himself.

"I plead thus not because I love Ali—I hate him—but as balm for my own wounds. You—" suddenly she raised her dark eyes to the embarrassed H.M.—"are much too kind-hearted and you have great influence with the Commissioner. Only four times in his life has Ali set eyes on the man Collier, and never once, I swear, on Iron Chest. I make this plea to you, and I say no more."

"I dunno what this is all about. But can't you do it?" growled H.M., in his most savage tone.

"The difficulty . . ." began Alvarez. But he was interrupted.

"Look!" snapped the still-squatting Perez, and thrust out his forefinger. "The crimson window. Look there!"

And again they saw the man who called himself Gregor Weehawken Collier, standing on the window sill.

★*With Collier about to escape—and the identity of "Iron Chest" still unknown—how will the net finally be closed and the tangle of mystery unravelled? The last part of this exciting story will appear in the next issue of ARGOSY, on sale March 7th. Why not make sure of your copy by placing an order with your newsagent?*

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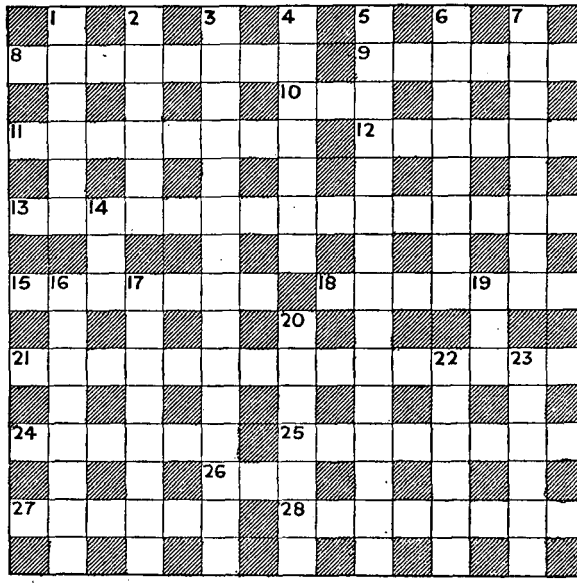
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 90



CLUES

Across

8 Where Sir Ralph the Rover went on the rocks! (8).

9 Hurry! This has a net return (6).

10 The girl to court? (3).

11 Fifty have gone from the front rank of the educated, and the remainder keep on repeating (8).

12 A dangerous lady to meet on bath-night! (6).

13 But this has no connection with Lady Day (9, 6).

15 An upset Sioux is worried (7).

18 Be careful, chaps, said the golfer, here come the overseers! (7).

21 Staunch supporters who may be put to the test sorrowfully (6, 9).

24 "The lizard, with his shadow on the stone, Rests like a shadow, and the — sleeps" Tennyson (6).

25 Hat with a bay band (8).

26 General shelter (3).

27 She was careless with her lamp and lost a lover (6).

28 There's bound to be a come-back if you hit this! (8).

Down

1 From the beginning following an absent sailor (6).

2 The city has strayed from the Chaldees to the middle of a temple (6).

3 But these stories were not told by Lamb! (10, 5).

4 Is the German dramatist going into a decline? (7).

5 Govt. chief lost in revising the Index (3, 4, 2, 6).

6 East, in France, are the mountains—perhaps the Great Divide? (8).

7 Keep apart from the pest area (8).

14 Levy; but not on the points system (3).

16 Self-contemplative flowers (8).

17 "Full of wise saws and modern —s" Shakespeare (8).

19 She's towards the western shores of the calm Aegean (3).

20 A hundred on a hundred, and then Excess Profits Tax; the very idea! (7).

22 "And you must love him, ere to you He will seem — of your love" Wordsworth (6).

23 Paid as part of the current allowance (6).

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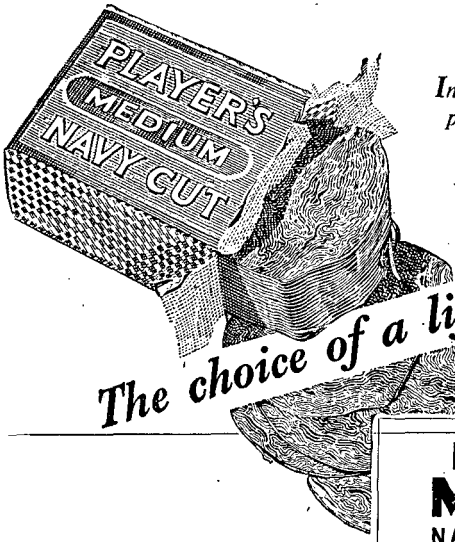

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